

# JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

## THE DREAM OF JESUS

### THE JESUS-FELLOWSHIP

*S. Kappen*

### THE HINDU ECCLESIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

*R. Panikkar*

### JESUS THE PROPHET

*G. Soares Prabhu*

### THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT IN THE BHAGAVADGITA

*F. X. D'Sa*

### JESUS AND THE FATHER

*S. Rayan*

### EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN HINDUISM

*I. Puthiadam*

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## Editorial

In the Old Testament, in Joel 3, there is a promise that in the new age God would pour out his Spirit on everyone, on all nations, and that all would prophesy and old people would dream dreams and young people see visions. In Acts 2 Peter is shown as referring to this passage and interpreting Pentecost as the fulfilment of this promise. But the foundational fulfilment is Jesus himself on whom the Spirit descended in bodily form. He was and is the prophet of the new age, the seer of its visions and the dreamer of its dreams.

The burden of his dreams, his central dream, was the New Man, the new human community, mankind shaping as a movement of friendship and realizing itself as a brotherhood. To this do point nearly all his teaching on God's reign, his presentation of God as Father, his emphasis on mutual forgiveness, his new commandment of love for one another, and his concern for table-fellowship as well as his self-disclosure in John chapters 13 to 17.

His was a seminal dream. Like a seed, it was not only itself but everything it could, and was destined to, become and blossom into. It was to be sown in the soil of many different minds and hearts and cultures, in diverse social groups and spiritual traditions and psychological sensitivities century after century. It was to realize itself in and through our dreams and evolve into a multitude of forms under the presidency of the Spirit. It was not a finished thing, but an essential tension calling for our dreams and reaching out into our future.

It evolves through endless adaptability, and realizes itself in multitudinous shapes and colours. No particular organizational form, crystallizing in a given cultural milieu in a given period of time can be considered essential or indispensable. The only

essential structure is the inner structure of love which expands hearts and horizons, making men brothers eager to serve to make one another great.

The six studies in this issue of *Jeevadhara* represent an effort to know the living Christ by understanding his dream of the New Man. The dream is situated not merely in the past but where it now exists in the communities that keep the memory of Jesus; and therefore also in relation to the life-context of the community. Accordingly three articles (1, 3 and 5) study respectively the movement that started out from Jesus (S. Kappen), the prophetic density of the movement (G. Soares Prabhu), and its ultimate roots in the experience Jesus had of God (S. Rayan). The remaining three articles (2, 4 and 6) correspond to these in order, and present the Hindu religious tradition as a non-organizational movement from which the Christian tradition has much to learn (R. Panikkar), an important and original prophetic voice in Hindu tradition, still ringing out from the pages of the Bhagavadgita (F. X. D'Sa), and the experience of God on which is founded the religious life of India (I. Puthiadam).

The result is the emergence of a few positive traits and suggestions for a new model of the church for India, for today. It is too early yet to begin to build with these bricks. They are therefore not collected here in one place, to avoid even an unconscious imposition on them of *a priori* patterns. Still it is remarkable how many common concerns appear in pieces written in complete independence of one another. Some of them may be found reflected in Tagore's prayer for our country. Like our country, may also the emerging community of Jesus' dream be a place where the mind is without fear of thought or of freedom, of men or of the future, of love or life or laughter or the gifts of God; where the head, every head and not some only, is held high in equality and dignity; where knowledge is free, its pursuit is unhindered, truth is a value, facts are respected; where the world is not broken up into the mighty rich and the powerless poor, into the sacred and the secular, into learned shepherds and stupid sheep, into jealous and competing bureaus, churches, rites and pseudo-rites, but all are built together in love into a movement of friendship and a great brotherhood; where words come from the depth of truth, and truth will [use fewer and less fulsome words

and begin to shine out more and more in silences, and orthodoxy will always have a father in orthopraxis; where we tirelessly strive for perfection not so much of laws and definitions and techniques of control as of freedom and warmth of affection and loving responsibility for one another; where reason does not lose its way in the sands of dead habit, and revelation is not smothered by traditions, nor love extinguished by legalism, nor initiative and joy strangled by authoritarian structures: where the mind is led forward by God and his Spirit into ever-widening thought and action, and not jailed in conservatism of the timid type or the lazy. May the community of Jesus' dream be a home of freedom and of deep humanity.

Vidya Jyoti  
Delhi - 6

Samuel Rayan

# The Jesus-Fellowship

## I. The approach

Our understanding of the church is determined by the angle from which we look at it. Traditionally we viewed the church as 'emanating' from the risen Jesus in whom dwells the fullness of the divinity. In consequence we tended to identify the church with the kingdom of God. Outside the visible community of christians we saw only imperfect participations of the spiritual riches which we, its members, possess by right and in abundance. We cordoned off the church from the rest of mankind, but all the same claimed as ours whatever was true and good in the latter by labelling it 'anonymous Christianity'. This way of thinking is at the root of that christian triumphalism from which we have not yet fully broken loose. Besides, it is essentially hypocritical. For we know well enough that the grandiose claims we make are not sociologically verified, that there may be as much evil in the church as outside it. Moreover, the traditional approach has rendered any attempt at dialogue with non-christians fruitless, since our claim to possess the fullest revelation has relegated them to a position of inferiority, and thereby put them on the defensive. Hence the need for a new understanding of the church.

The approach I have followed in this paper may be called historical. It consists in viewing things from the point of view of the Jesus of history. The following are the positive reasons for this shift in perspective: First, what is distinctive about the judeo-christian world-outlook is precisely that it is in history it sees the revelation of the truth regarding God and man. It is also the only outlook that is in harmony with the contemporary quest for truth which has for its point of departure man's collective historical experience. Second, the image of Jesus and his church projected by the community of believers at different stages of history is itself in need of a criterion by which we may judge its validity. And this criterion can be nothing else than the life and teachings of the Jesus of history understood in the light of our present experience of the living God. Third, the

historical approach restores the man Jesus to His rightful place in theological thinking and will lay the basis for a new humanism in tune with the self-understanding of man today.

I am fully aware of the problems posed by 'the quest of the historical Jesus', knowledge of whom has come down to us only as mediated through the faith of the early christian community. However, I do not share the view that this faith is so opaque a veil as to totally hide the visage of Jesus. Rather, the historical truth regarding Jesus was itself a central concern of the early christian faith (See Lk. 1: 1-4). Hence it is possible for us today to gain an understanding of Jesus adequate enough to make our christian existence meaningful. It is this conviction that has inspired me to engage in a new search for the meaning of the church, of which this paper is but a tentative formulation.

## **II. The reign of God**

The all-absorbing concern of Jesus was the reign of God. He lived in the hope that God would come to rule over the world and to gather in his people. "The right time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe in the Good News!" (Mk. 1:15). It was for the sake of the Kingdom that he gathered around Him disciples who form the historical nucleus of the church. Hence in order to understand the meaning of the church it is necessary to grasp the nature of the reign of God Jesus announced.

### **I. The not yet and the already**

Jesus, like the prophets of old, looked forward to God who would come to bless the poor, comfort the mourning, show mercy to the merciful, satisfy those who hunger and thirst for justice, give the promised land to the meek, reveal his face to the pure of heart, gather into his family all who work for peace among men, and thus bring history to its fulfilment (Mt. 5: 3-11). But the absolute future he announced, though it transcends history, does not reduce it to a total void. For the God who is to come is also one who is coming and in a sense is already come in our midst. He is already at work in the here and now of history: "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the

Kingdom of God has come upon you." (Lk. 11:20) The Kingdom emerges in human society wherever people love one another, and in so loving meet the God of love (Mt. 7:21; 25:40).

By inviting us to look to God who is beyond the beyond as our absolute future, Jesus freed us from the tyranny of time. The future that is God relativizes all the achievements of the past as well as the institutions, laws, and customs, which condition our existence in the present. He thereby made us free for the future, for the working out of the mysterious plan of God in history. On the other hand, by proclaiming the reign of God as already emerging in the world, he showed the way to freedom from all false dualisms – of this world and the other, of this age and the age beyond, of matter and spirit, and of the temporal and the eternal. He likewise liberated us from all utopian hopes which, by focusing our thoughts on an imaginary beyond, deflect our energies from the challenges of the real world.

## 2. The Total Man

The Reign of God in its final flowering as well as in its emergence consists in the salvation not merely of individuals but of the entire family of man. It is above all to gather a people and to abide with them that God comes and is at work in our midst. Jesus uses many and varied symbols to express this truth. He speaks of this new humanity as the flock (Mk. 14:27; Lk. 12:32), the throng of wedding guests (Mk. 2:19), God's planting (Mt. 13:24ff.), the net (Mt. 13:47), the city of God (Mt. 5:14), the people of the New Covenant (Mk. 14:24), the new family of God (Mk. 3:34–35; Mt. 23:9; 25:40), the eternal home (Lk. 16:9), the New Temple (Mk. 11:17), the festal meal (Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:30). The Kingdom of God is the realization of the Total Man as a theandric community of love.

The new people of God breaks all bounds set by birth, status, race or religion. It is open to all who have faith in God. It is significant that nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels does Jesus explicitly demand faith in Himself. The reference to faith in Jesus in Mt. 18:6 and 27:42 is considered to be an addition by Matthew to the Marcan text (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, New York, 1971, p. 162). What Jesus demands explicitly or implicitly is faith in God (Mk. 11:22). This faith

could coexist with membership in any ethnic or religious group. We find Jesus imputing faith to the Samaritan leper (Lk. 17:19), the Syro-phoenician woman (Mk. 7:25 - 30), and to the gentile nobleman (Mt. 8.5ff.). His vision of the universality of the Kingdom finds clearer expression in His saying: "Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! For the person who does what God wants him to do is my brother, my sister, my mother." (Mk. 3:34 - 35) The new brotherhood He envisages has for its basis neither kinship nor cult nor any set of doctrines but solely man's absolute concern for the will of God, in other words, faith manifested in deeds of love. And the love of God in question is shown in the love of one's neighbour. Hence on the last day of reckoning it will be solely by the standard of brotherly love that God decides whether man should be awarded or denied entry into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:31ff.).

The Jesuan vision of the Kingdom as accessible to all who have faith active in love liberates us from sectarianism and religious bigotry. It makes us free for encountering God in all men of good will irrespective of their caste, community or even religion. It opens our eyes to the truth that the dividing line between the Kingdom of God and that of Satan runs not through social classes or communities but through the heart of every man. It so broadens our mind and heart that we can enfold within a cosmic WE all those who seek the face of God in sincerity. It poses also a challenge for us to pull down all barriers we have erected between man and man in the name of religion.

### **3. The Free Man**

God is at work in history forming a community of men united in love. And love is the matrix of freedom. The irruption of the God of love in the person of Jesus is marked by freedom from the cosmic powers which hold man in bondage: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life (Lk. 7:22-23). So too the poor, that class of people bent under the weight of oppression and having none to plead their cause, hear the good news of freedom from injustice (Lk. 4:18-19). Jesus also brought the good news of freedom from religious formalism (Mt. 5:24) and from the legalism that cripples the spirit and kills love (Mk.

2:17; 7:1-17). By criticizing the practice of Corban which dispensed men from the obligation of loving their parents, and the law of Sabbath which barred them from doing good to their fellowmen, He proclaimed the truth that no law or custom that goes against the demands of love can ever bind in conscience (Mk. 3:4; 7:9-12). All this shows that for Jesus the reign of God meant the reign of freedom.

The reign of God which brings into being the Total Man free from every alienation and free for the fullness of love was the focal point upon which all the energies of Jesus converged. His whole being was in tension towards the God who comes to rule over man and the universe. His words, "Set your mind on God's kingdom and His justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well" (Mt. 6:33), sum up his own fundamental attitude to life. Everything else, including the new fellowship He initiated takes on its full meaning only when seen in the light of his commitment to the Kingdom.

### **III. The Jesus-Fellowship**

Every great man committed to a cause gathers around him disciples. This is what Jesus too did, as all the Gospels attest. "I have chosen you to stay with me, I will also send you out to preach, and you will have authority to drive out demons." (Mk. 3: 14-15) These words addressed to the Twelve give us the substance of discipleship in general.

#### **I. Staying with Jesus**

Jesus chose those whom He wanted so that they might *stay with him*, i. e. share his faith, his hope and his destiny. In the measure in which the disciples were open to God He initiated them into the mysteries of the Kingdom. He revealed to them the truth that history is tending to its consummation and that in His word and deed they were already witnessing the beginning of the end. He also strove to instil in them the values of the Kingdom: "You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all." (Lk. 10:

42-44) Similarly, in the Sermon on the Mount He instructed the disciples in the ethics of the Kingdom. When asked by them for a prayer that would distinguish them from the many religious sects in Palestine, He taught them the 'Our Father' which is a vibrant expression of hope in the reign of God to come. In all his teaching the aim was not so much to reveal Himself as to reveal God's purpose in history. Even where He reveals himself, the stress is on His role in making present the reality of the Kingdom. Finally, Jesus demanded from his followers that they should identify themselves with His destiny. They are equally under the divine *must* as their master. "The Son of Man *must* suffer much, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teacher of the Law." (Mk. 8: 31). The question Jesus asked the sons of Zebedee is addressed to all disciples: "Can you drink the cup that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?" (Ibid. 10: 39) It follows from what has been said that 'staying with Jesus' has to be understood as essentially oriented to the reign of God.

The new fellowship which Jesus formed may be understood also in a broader sense so as to include, besides the disciples, all those who shared his expectation of the reign of God. He sought the company of the marginalized in society, the publicans and the sinners, contact with whom was forbidden by orthodox Jews. By inviting them to table-fellowship (Mk. 2: 15-17; Mt. 9: 10-13) He attacked the distinction between the sacred and the profane which was a fundamental tenet of Judaism. This could well be one, if not the most important, reason why the religious establishment decided to get rid of Him (Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, London, 1967, pp. 102-103). Though He believed He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel He did not deny the Gentiles who had faith in the benefits of His ministry of healing. In fact His table-fellowship with publicans and sinners is to be understood as an anticipation of the eschatological meal open also to the Gentiles: "Many, I tell you, will come from east and west to feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 8: 11). The universality of the Kingdom finds its reflection in the universality of the Jesuan Fellowship.

## 2. By word and power

Jesus did not form the circle of disciples so that they might sit around and contemplate Him or offer Him worship. He demanded that they should follow Him in His march to the Father. For His face was set on Jerusalem where He had to meet his destiny. Before that He had to tread the highways and by-ways of Palestine preaching the good news from God and vanquishing the powers of evil opposed to the Kingdom. This He commanded his disciples to do. They were to preach what they heard their master preach, namely, that God's rule had already broken into history and that the time had come for decision either for or against Him. They were to announce the emergence in history of the Total Man reborn in freedom. But this was only one aspect of their mission. Equally decisive was the task assigned to them to drive out the demons. To grasp the full meaning of this mission it is necessary to keep in mind that in the time of Jesus demons were thought to be responsible for evil in general, physical (storms, floods, accidents, diseases, etc.) as well as moral (moral blindness, disobedience to God, etc.). 'Driving out demons' is therefore a comprehensive term which means declaring war against everything that militates against God's dominion over man and the universe (D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Pelican New Testament Commentaries, Reprint 1972, pp. 44-45).

## IV. The Jesus-Fellowship and the church of today

The fellowship which Jesus created is the nucleus of the church of later times. In any renewal of the church the structure and dynamism of its origins have to play a normative role. If so, certain conclusions impose themselves on us.

1. The basic conclusion we arrive at is that the church is not something that is intelligible in itself. Nor does it exist for itself. It derives its being and meaning from the fact that it exists *for* the reign of God. It is not so much an institution as a community straining itself towards the realization of the new humanity envisaged by Jesus. It is a collective longing and search for something greater than itself, namely, the full revelation of the reality of God in the visage of man. It is true to its essence only in the measure in which it commits itself to promoting the interests of the Kingdom. Those who reduce it to

a sort of tent in which we may settle down for good deserve the same rebuke which Jesus administered to Peter: "Away with you, Satan, you think as men think, not as God thinks." (Mk. 8: 33)

2. The full realization of the Kingdom as a theandric community is something yet to come. It is no more than a horizon of hope. To live in this hope is to accept having to grope in the dark, to take risks and to live without the security this world can provide. To leave behind all secure moorings and march ahead to the unknown is the destiny of the church. Fidelity to this destiny demands that the church should resolutely reject every temptation to absolutize the relative or to use past standards to judge the present and the future. Where the living God demands, she should be prepared to go even beyond Jesus, recognizing full well that He too was a product of His culture.

3. In Jesus we have the irruption of the divine in the already-here-and-now of history. It was the spirit of God that descended upon Him at the time of His baptism which drove Him into the desert, sent Him on the mission of preaching and healing, and finally led Him to the Cross. Similarly the church can fulfil its mission only if it has *already* come under the power of the spirit of God. How can it in honesty preach the Kingdom of God if it is not itself governed by the ethics of the Kingdom? How can it work for the reign of freedom if it suppresses freedom of thought and expression in its own ranks, if its leaders lord it over their subjects and make them feel the weight of authority? How can it proclaim the primacy of love if its own life is characterized by the primacy of cult and law? How can it be an instrument in the hands of God for the realization of the Total Man if it is a house divided against itself? How can it drive out demons by the finger of God if it has already entered into a concordat with the demons of money, prestige and political power?

4. We saw that the universality of the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed found expression in His table-fellowship with publicans and sinners and in His openness to the Gentiles. If so, the structures of the church which is but the continuation in history of the Jesuan fellowship must also be open to all men of good will committed to truth, justice and love. This is especially true

of the Eucharist which, on the one hand, looks back to the table-fellowship of Jesus, and, on the other, looks forward to the festal meal of the end-time when Jew and Gentile shall sit at the table of God.

5. Finally a word about the mission of the church today. The task which Jesus entrusted to his disciples has in no way lost its relevance or urgency. Our task as disciples of Jesus is to preach the reign of God, to interpret and proclaim God's will as manifested in the situations, events, forces, and trends of the world we live in. It is to work for the birth of a new humanity in which men will live *in* and *for* one another, in which the freedom of each individual will be the condition for the freedom of all, and conversely, the freedom of all will be the condition for the freedom of each. No less relevant and urgent is the task of driving out demons. Expressed in non-mythical terms, it means that we have to engage in a constant struggle against the economic, social, political, ideological, and other forces which enslave man. The demons of today are not only power for evil inherent in human freedom but also the sins embodied in social structures, customs, and false systems of values and ideas, like social exploitation, inequality, casteism, communalism, corruption, prostitution, materialism, hedonism etc. A church that does not fight against these 'demons' is nothing less than an institutionalized betrayal of Jesus.

Sevaniketan  
Kalamassery

Sebastian Kappen

# The Hindu Ecclesial Consciousness –

## Some Ecclesiological Reflections

1. “To what extent is Hinduism a movement? What has it to teach the Church or the Christ-movement in its attempt to recover the dynamism of its Founder’s vision?” is the question I have been asked

The importance of this question is twofold: On the one hand it presents the right perspective for a global i.e. catholic way of theologizing which is the only congruent method for our present times. It suggests that theologies or simply religious reflections can no longer function in isolation from one another and that they have to learn from a reciprocally fecundating *dialogical dialogue*. Not a single human problem today can be properly put – let alone solved – if not in a cross-cultural context. Thus, the problem of the nature of the Christian Church is not independent of the nature of Hinduism. This is undoubtedly true for India, but I submit that it is also the case for a general ecclesiology.

On the other hand this question not only challenges traditional Christian ecclesiology but it also offers a possibility of considering the nature of the Church in a radically different view. It offers the possibility of a constructive model without excessive concern for destructive criticism<sup>1</sup>.

We shall limit ourselves to a few remarks concerning this latter question<sup>2</sup>.

1. Cf. R. Panikkar, “‘Super hanc petram’. Due principi ecclesiologici: La Rocca e Le Chiavi”, in *Legge e Vangelo, Discussione su una legge fondamentale per la Chiesa*. Brescia (Paideia), 1972, pp. 135-145.
2. I had to face the dilemma, either not to respond at all to this important question or to do it in an imperfect and

2. Hinduism is not a *proper name*. It is a *common name*. It designates not so much a particular religion as a bundle of religious traditions. There is nothing concrete which 'Hinduism' stands for unless one makes a sheer abstraction from many particular forms of life as well as patterns of thought and behaviour. It is not a proper *name* either. It is an *improper name*. It was given by outsiders (Christians, Muslims) in order to differentiate themselves from the 'Hindus'. Hinduism is happier without *nāma-rūpa*, name and form, because it has as many names and forms as the case may require.

And yet, Hinduism is vital and effective; it is an almost all-pervasive dimension of human life in Greater India (and it begins to be so also elsewhere) influencing even the insights and outlooks of other religious traditions. It shows an uncommon capacity for assimilation and a peculiar contagious strength in spite of the fact that certain forms of traditional Hinduism are changing or even collapsing.

3. Hinduism has no Founder and the Vedas have no author responsible for them, to whom or to whose intention any hermeneutical device could appeal. They are self-interpretative and they are themselves their last instance. The traditional *apauruṣeya* or 'non-authorship' of the Vedas does not mean that nobody wrote or recited them for the first time. It means that the relation between their words and their meaning is primordial and intrinsic, so that there is no author positing the type of relationship which exists between the word and its meaning. To explain this relationship would require another agency to tell us what the words mean and *sic ad infinitum*.

Furthermore, Hinduism is not in any way weak because it does not have a Founder, nor the Vedas an author. This fact explains the practical adaptability as well as the theoretical flexi-

sketchy manner, more by way of suggestions than by constructions and answers. This article is only a very small contribution to the entire issue and leans fraternally on the other articles of this number of *Jeevadhara*. I would like to apologize for the self-references due to the impossibility to develop further the quoted ideas.

bility for which Hinduism is well known. There is hardly place here for heterodoxy. This latter would require a departure from a doctrinal canon, which becomes irrelevant in the setting of the *orthopraxis* that Hinduism stresses.

All this implies that the ‘apostolic succession’, i.e. the existential continuity, the historical handing over to the succeeding generations is an existential trait of Hinduism, without being tied down to a particular doctrinal interpretation.

4. Hinduism is a real movement because it is a living myth - in the newly recovered technical meaning of the term. It does not need an established authority or an institutional religious community or a body of correct doctrines (orthodoxy),

How does it function then? It functions as a human dimension built into the life of the people, as a frame of reference to which all ultimate problems are almost instinctively referred, as an inspiring force of the variegated *sampradāyas*, traditions, sects, organizations, which do not need to have a formal link with one another in order to be manifestations of one and the same spirit<sup>3</sup>.

What then does it mean to be a Hindu? Has Hinduism no ecclesial consciousness? Do Hindus have no group consciousness, no collective identity? To be a Hindu does not mean much more than not to reject the *karma*, the heritage of being geographically or historically born of an Indian stock. To be a Hindu does not amount to much more than this acceptance of an everlasting *dharma*. In point of fact, nobody is ever a Hindu in the abstract; one is always a Hindu of a particular brand, of a concrete group, caste, sect, ashram— and with a personal coefficient which allows, justifies and even, in a way, demands a personal

3. There is no point in describing here at length what is of common knowledge today regarding the nature of Hinduism. For a Summary cf. the chapter “Algunos aspectos fenomenológicos de la espiritualidad hindú actual” in: R. Panikkar *Misterio y Revelación. Hinduismo y Cristianismo: Encuentro de dos culturas*. Madrid (Marova), 1971, pp. 25-49,

interpretation. This latter fact prevents any kind of feeling of guilt or disloyalty if one happens to have a personal view which does not tally with that of one's surroundings, for instance. There is hardly any place for heterodoxy here; even the conception of heresy makes little or no sense.

5. Now that these simple facts are recalled, we may address ourselves to the question originally asked, and try and answer in a few, condensed paragraphs.

6. Hinduism has nothing to 'teach' the Christian Church, but the latter has a lot to learn from the former. If Christians in India wish to take seriously their incarnational vocation, down to the depths of their own existence, they will have to overcome the temptation of a facile Hindu social docetism. I mean that a truly incarnational attitude cannot be justified by just imitating external forms of 'indianness'. Besides being hypocritical it would be docetic. The Christian principle of incarnation is not a mere device at accommodation, much less a strategic move.

7. My second remark here would bear on the very way of framing the question: Is the Church the fruit of the "Founder's" vision or rather a result of the continuation of the incarnational principle, or - if we prefer more traditional language - the fruit of divine 'Providence' acting in and through men in always new and unpredictable ways? I feel uncomfortable with the metaphor of a 'Founder'. Christ was a seed which died and produced much fruit, but the tree is not just the seed, nor are the fruits mere expressions, or modifications of the seed: the growth is real<sup>4</sup>.

If we assume a "Founder's vision", we may not understand the present day ecclesial Christian reality (was it really Jesus' vision?), nor the meaning of Christian existence in India. I take "The Dream of Jesus" to mean the dreams and longings of Christians today. What are their aspirations when they allow the inspirations of the Spirit to come through?

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4. Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Category of Growth in Comparative Religion" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 66, Nr. 1 (January 1973), pp. 113-140.

In one way or another it is, however, a legitimate – and urgent – problem.

8. The great lesson from Hinduism is that Christianity can subsist and indeed survive without a “church” organization. I do not say that Christians should destroy their organizations or that these are useless or wrong. I do say that they are neither immutable nor essential and that they are not the Church. I would submit that the Church is a living *organism* and that as such, can very well live without the present-day *organization*. I would further suggest that Hinduism proves that a living religious tradition can exist without organization and that the Indian church could well be called upon to undergo this experience<sup>5</sup>.

What keeps the Church together is not the might of ‘organization-man’, nor the cohesion and discipline of a ‘corporation’, but the power of the Spirit, the unifying myth of a people with a certain sense of identity, mission, vocation, with no other link than a common, but ever-elusive because ever-transcending, act of faith.

What the Church could learn from Hinduism is that ecclesial consciousness does not need to be a closed-group consciousness, and that self-identity does not need to be affirmed against the background of different-identity. The Church might as well try to develop a catholic, universal, consciousness in today’s real global context. Church-consciousness could then become equated with a *concrete* consciousness of being man. Is not the ‘Son of Man’ the self-chosen title of Christ? The Church could learn that the price of her catholicity implies the *kenosis*, the emptying herself of every particular form which she tends to *identify* with her nature. There are many mansions in the Father’s Kingdom. Being Church, then, would not be equal to being man, but it would signify a very concrete consciousness of belonging to the Family of Man. This consciousness can be split up into as many tongues as at Pentecost, each being different from and

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5. Cf. R. Panikkar, “The Alternative. A Kairological Meditation on the All India Seminar on the Church in India”, *The Examiner*, Bombay (April 12 and 19th, 1969, pp. 1-4).

even unintelligible to the other except for the fact of a common consciousness that all express the *megaleīa*, the 'great deeds of God'.

9. What is fundamental in the Church, or in other words the central ecclesiological character, is its *sacramental structure*, the Body of Christ in Pauline terms. The *sacramentum mundi* is certainly material, visible, historical, but this is only the external aspect of an inner core, a living soul which manifests itself in as many forms as the universal saving will of God may deem it convenient – to echo expressions of the New Testament.

It is the sacramental structure, the cosmo-theandric reality which makes the Church so basically visible that her visible boundaries cannot be encompassed by the naked eye,

This structure is visible and invisible, human and divine, concrete and universal (not particular and general). However, it does not ultimately depend on psychological or organizational devices. The Church could, paradoxically, learn from Hinduism that the gospel injunction to live without fear, without anxiety, without a 'police' mentality – as being responsible for 'law and order' – is not a utopian dream.

To stretch the paradox further, what the Church could learn from Hinduism is confidence in the Spirit, which can be translated as confidence in the people, in the unifying myth that still holds believers together. The theological virtues are also cosmological<sup>6</sup>.

The model for the Church which comes to mind is both biblical and *śrautīc* (i.e. related to the *śruti* or revealed Scriptures). It is the simple model of a people. But when we say 'people' we should not understand race, as if it were only an

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6. Cf. my contribution to the Bombay Eucharistic Congress, "Relations of Christians to their Non-Christian Surroundings" in the *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies*, Vol. IV, (March-April, 1965) pp. 303-348, reprinted in *Christian Revelation and World Religions* – with the same title-, edited by J. Neuner, London (Burns & Oates) 1967, pp. 143-184.

ethnic entity. Neither should we conceive it as nation – it is not a question of sovereignty. Nor should we understand by it State as if it were all a question of power. It is not blood, or history, or the holding of a particular passport which makes the people what they are. Certainly, each people creates its own institutions, but no living people becomes a slave of its institutions, nor gets entangled with them. The sabbath is made for man and not vice-versa. ‘People of God’, certainly, but the metaphor should be taken in all its depth. ‘God’s people’ – and not white, Christian, or educated or such other people – is a way of saying that the Church is a people, just a people without discrimination of race, culture, religion and so on, for God does not discriminate among persons; all those who are moved by His Spirit are sons of God. But is there any need to quote Scripture? Whoever is people is *we*.

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# Jesus the Prophet

No one formula can comprehend adequately the mystery of Jesus, for his words and deeds refuse to be reduced to the stereotype of any conventional category. Still, the term ‘prophet’ describes the Jesus of history, Jesus as he must have appeared to his contemporaries, adequately enough. True, Jesus in the Gospels receives the courtesy title of ‘Rabbi’ (Mk 9: 5; 11: 21; 14: 45), uses rabbinic forms of teaching (cf. the parables of Mt 13), engages in rabbinic discussions (cf. the controversies of Mk 2: 1–3: 6; 12: 13–37), interprets the Law like a rabbi (cf. the antitheses of Mt 5: 21–47), and gathers disciples to instruct them as the rabbis were wont to do (Mk 1: 16–20; 6: 7–11).<sup>1</sup> But his power-filled words and deeds are far more reminiscent of the great prophets of ancient Israel than of the hair-splitting ‘canon-lawyers’ of the scribal schools of his day.

For when Jesus taught, he taught “as one having authority and not as their scribes” (Mt 7: 28). Indeed, the absolute assurance of his “amen, amen I say to you” goes well beyond not only the “it is written” of the scribes, but even the “thus says the Lord” of the Old Testament prophets. It is not canonical Scripture, nor even the consciousness of being the spirit-filled mouthpiece of the Lord, that is the source of Jesus’ authoritative

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1. Cf. C. H. Dodd, “Jesus as Teacher and Prophet”, in *Mysterium Christi: Christological Studies by British and German Theologians*, ed. G. K. Bell and A. Deissmann (London 1930) 53–66, sp. pp. 53–55. But note that the Gospel conception of discipleship follows the prophetic rather than the rabbinic tradition. For, while the disciples of the rabbis choose the master they are to study under, and are his disciples only until they become rabbis themselves; the disciples of Jesus are called by him (Mk 1: 16–20; 2: 13f) to a permanent relation of discipleship (Mt 28: 19). The Synoptic stories of the calling of the first disciples (Mk 1: 16–20 par) are, in fact, modelled closely on the Old Testament narrative of the calling of Elisha to his prophetic function (1 Kgs 19: 19–21).

utterance, but his own innate sense of authority and mission. The burden of this authoritative teaching, too, is not the casuistic interpretation of the Law, but the prophetic proclamation of imminent salvation ("The kingdom of God is at hand"), with its call to urgent and radical decision ("Be converted and believe in the good news"). And Jesus proclaims this coming of the kingdom not in words alone, but in 'mighty deeds', in exorcisms which signal the end of Satan's domination (Mt 12: 27f) and in healings which announce the dawning of God's reign (Mt 11: 2-6), deeds which are not unlike those wrought by the great 'men of God' (Elijah and Elisha) who stand at the beginnings of Israel's prophecy.<sup>2</sup> Jesus resorts too, like the classical book-prophets of Israel (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) to symbolic actions, acted parables (like the triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Mk 11: 1-10, or the cursing of the fig tree in Mk 11: 12-14, 20-23), which powerfully drive home his message.<sup>3</sup> Neither a priest (for unlike John the Baptist he was not born into a priestly family), nor a scribe (for unlike Paul he was not brought up in a scribal school), Jesus is most emphatically a prophet, a spirit-filled man (Mk 1: 9-11), "mighty in deed and word" (Lk 24: 19), called out of the anonymity of a wholly unpretentious 'lay' existence (Mk 6: 3) to speak (in an utterly unique and authoritative way) *for God*, and announce his salvation.

It is not surprising, then, that the 'crowds' recognize Jesus as a prophet (Mk 6: 15; Mt 21: 11; Lk 7: 16), indeed as *the* prophet, that is, as the eschatological *avatar* of Moses promised in Dt 18: 15 (Jn 6: 14). His disciples too acknowledge him as one (Lk 24: 19); and Jesus himself twice at least compares his destiny to that of a prophet, for like a prophet he is "not without honour except in his own country" (Mk 6: 4); and he too must die in Jerusalem like a prophet (Lk 13: 33).

2. Compare for instance the resuscitation of the widow's son by Jesus in Lk 7: 11-17 with the resuscitation of the son of the Shunemite woman by Elisha in 2 Kgs 4: 32-37; and the feeding of the Five Thousand in Mk 6: 34-43 with the feeding miracle worked by Elisha in 2 Kgs 4: 42-44.
3. Cf. 2 Kgs 13: 14-19; Is 8: 1-4; 20: 1-5; Jer 27: 1-7; Ez 4: 1-17; 5: 1-12; Hos 1: 2-8.

### The prophet in Israel

Old Testament prophecy offers thus a convenient and illuminating model for understanding the ministry of Jesus. What then are the characteristic elements of this model? In complementary contrast to the institutional offices of priest and king (both of which are not original to Israel, but were introduced more or less ready-made from outside)<sup>4</sup>, the Old Testament prophet is a *charismatic* figure. For while priesthood and kingship are stable structures into which persons are inducted by ‘ordination’ or birth, prophetism is a dynamic function specific (in its Old Testament form) to Israel, to which an individual is summoned by a special call.<sup>5</sup> This special call is an essential part of the prophet’s role – necessarily so, because the prophet is an extra-institutional figure, summoned to special tasks unforeseen by and beyond the competence of the traditional institutional structures of his community. He must communicate a new understanding of God, spell out the new demands posed by the changed circumstances of history, ‘renew’ a people grown slack in their observance of the covenant stipulations, or lukewarm in their trust in the covenant God. The prophet is thus God’s instrument for the renewal of the institution. He is the goad which prods the people of God, to keep it moving in dynamic response to the changing situations of history, and to bring it back to the right path in case it has strayed. He is God’s answer to the bureaucratic routinization that is the occupational disease of every institution. He is God’s agent of permanent revolution. He is the assertion of the absolute sovereignty of God who sits in judgment over every institution, even his own, and will allow

4. Cf. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, I (London 1961) 392.

5. Cf. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (London 1966) 46: “... the personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet’s claim is based on personal revelation and charisma.”

no structure, no matter how sacred, to usurp the place which belongs to him alone.<sup>6</sup>

Because of this his extra-(and so inevitably anti-)institutional role, the prophet is always a figure of conflict. Unlike the false prophets of peace who, belonging to the coteries of the Court and the Temple, are the professional supporters of the *status quo*, complacently proclaiming (in obstinate blindness to the crises brewing) “‘peace, peace’, when there is no peace” (Jer 6: 14; cf. also 1 Kgs 22: 11; Jer 14: 13; 23: 16f; Ez 13: 16; Mic 3: 5), the true prophets of Yahweh are predominantly prophets of judgment.<sup>7</sup> They disturb, threaten, denounce, challenge, condemn. Indeed a characteristic, if not *the* characteristic, form of prophetic utterance is the *rib*, the court-room arraignment in which the prophet as God’s advocate addresses a charge-sheet against his sin-laden people (cf. Is 1: 2-3; Jer 2: 4-13; Mic 6: 1-8).<sup>8</sup>

Seared by his experience of the unutterable holiness of God, and obsessed by the need for radical conversion that this holiness demands from everyone who encounters it (Is 6: 1-6), the prophet becomes the tireless champion of God’s absolute sovereignty, summoning his community to an unconditional (almost foolhardy!) trust in, and an absolute commitment to its God. Such trust and commitment must ‘show itself in an inner uprightness and a social concern that goes well beyond the formal pieties of ritual and law. So the prophets reject a cult in which ritual has become a substitute for uprightness of life (Is 1: 10-17; Amos 5: 21-24). They demand a real conversion of heart (Jer 31: 31f; Ez 36: 27; Hos 2: 14). They will have nothing to do with a politi-

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- 6. On Old Testament prophetism cf. especially, Eichrodt, *op. cit.* (see n. 4 above) 338-91; G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II (Edinburgh 1965) 50-125; L. Ramlot, art. “Prophétisme: la prophétie biblique”, in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, VIII (Paris 1971) 909-1222.
  - 7. Ramlot, *op. cit.* (see n. 6 above) 1049-50.
  - 8. Cf. R. North, “Angel-Prophet or Satan-Prophet”, *Zeitschrift fuer die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1970) 3i - 67; H. B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959) 285-95.

cal prudence which refuses to risk all on the covenant fidelity of God alone (Is 8: 5-8; 30: 1-7). They denounce every form of exploitation (Amos 4: 1-3; 8: 4-9), and demand a radical concern for the defenceless and the needy (Is 58: 6-12), because the God they encountered and in whose name they speak is a God who 'executes justice' for the widow, the orphan and the refugee (Dt 10: 17; Ps 68: 5), and 'saves all the oppressed of the earth' (Ps 76: 9; 103: 6; 146: 7-10).

### The prophetic role of Jesus

Jesus stands well within this prophetic tradition. Indeed he brings this tradition to its apogee, embodying the values of Old Testament prophetism in an altogether unique way. Like the prophets of Israel, he too is overwhelmed by the reality of God and the demands that this makes upon the man who encounters it. Indeed he proclaims this with a special urgency, because he is aware that in him the 'kingdom', God's definitive offer of salvation, has come, precipitating a crisis in the lives of men and summoning them to a most radical decision. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel," says Mark (1: 15), summarizing accurately, though in the language of the early Church, the burden of Jesus' preaching<sup>9</sup>. The time has come for the decisive intervention through which God will free the world from the forces of sin and death which hold it in their grip, and men must respond to this dramatic and urgent challenge by 'repentance' (*metanoia*)—a word to be understood not in the Hellenistic sense of a feeling of remorse for one or other action, but in the Old Testament prophetic sense of a total turning (*sûb*) of the whole person towards God.

Such a total turning (conversion) demands the unreserved acknowledgment of God as God, and therefore as the one in whom alone we place our security and trust. It demands, too, a radical concern for our fellow-men, because God is the creator who "claims his creation and therefore requires our unconditional love of our neighbour and our unqualified readiness to serve and

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9. Cf. L. Legrand, *Good News and Witness* (Bangalore 1973) 13-25.

forgive, because anything less means the ruin of every creature”<sup>10</sup>. Obedience and love are thus the two co-ordinates of the eschatological existence lived and proclaimed by Jesus. On the first two commandments “depend all the law and the prophets” (Mt. 22: 40); and these commandments are “much more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices” (Mk. 12: 33).

Both law and cult are thus overshadowed by love in the prophetic proclamation of Jesus. For not only does Jesus continue the prophetic protest against a cult which has become a mechanical ritual (Mt. 9: 13 = Hos 6: 6), and a law which has degenerated into casuistic legalism (Mk. 7: 9-13), but he comes as the ‘eschatological alternative’ which takes the place of law and cult. Salvation is now no longer the automatic outcome of the performance of prescribed rites, nor a merited reward for the faithful observance of the detailed prescriptions of the Law. It is a free gift from God to be accepted by faith in Jesus, and shown forth in a life of love. It is in this sense that Jesus both fulfils (Mt. 5: 17-21) and at the same time abrogates (Rom 10: 4; Heb 10: 12) law and cult. That is to say he relativizes them, subsuming them into a higher economy where law and cult have no independent value of their own, but are significant only as expressions of that inner attitude of obedience and concern in which man’s true renewal consists.

### **Jesus and the cult**

Such relativizing is particularly evident in Jesus’ attitude towards cult. “Within the holy Temple area, even within sight of the reeking altars themselves”, writes Lohmeyer, commenting on Mk. 12: 33, “the complete overthrow of sacrifice and Temple is proclaimed.... Man does not require any particular holy sacrifice or mediation of priests, or Jewish nationalism; his relationship to God is determined not by what he gives to God at a holy place but by whether or not he loves God in his neighbour.”<sup>11</sup>

10. E. Kaesemann, *Jesus Means Freedom* (London 1969) 25.

11. E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord of the Temple* (London 1961) 47.

God is therefore to be worshipped neither in Jerusalem nor on Gerizim, for the time has come "when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23). The coming of Jesus has sacralized the cosmos, eliminating the distinction between the sacred and the profane. There are now no 'holy' places (whether Jerusalem or Rome!) to which the presence of God is confined; no intrinsically 'holy' things (whether trees, rivers, stones, medals, images) endowed with an innate sanctifying power. There are only saving *events* (the death and resurrection of Jesus), of which things and places can, when associated with the appropriate interpreting word, become the sacramental sign. Every place can now be the locus of a man's encounter with God; for it is the risen Christ, present everywhere, who is now "the 'place' where men of any time or place can at last be free of 'place' in their worship of God."<sup>12</sup>

And just as there are no 'holy' places, there are now no 'unclean' things. "Nothing that goes into a man from the outside (what he eats, drinks or touches) can defile him: it is the things that come out of him (his thoughts, words and feelings) that defile him", says Jesus (Mk. 7:15), abrogating all the rules of ritual purity at a stroke. He thus challenges not only "the letter of the Torah and the authority of Moses himself", but, beyond that, "the presuppositions of the whole cultic ritual of antiquity with its sacrifice and atonement"<sup>13</sup>.

The Sabbath too is "made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27) - a dramatic reversal which, once and for all, puts every institution in its place, subordinating it to man's welfare and demanding that it be a means of service and not an instrument of power. And because "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:6-10), reconciliation with God is now effected not through expiatory rites, but only through a personal faith-encounter with the eschatological Lord.

12. J. Marsh, *The Gospel of St. John* (London 1968) 218.

13. E. Kaesemann quoted in G. Bornkamm, *Jesus o, Nazareth* (New York 1960) 98.

Cult, then, is radically disempowered. "No prescribed ritual can any longer promise purity. No sacrifice can blot out sins, no holy Sabbath laws are any longer valid...."<sup>14</sup> And so religious outcasts (the tax-collectors and the prostitutes) enter the kingdom before the learned scribes and the pious Pharisees (Mt. 21 : 31); and the disparaged gentiles come from the East and the West to enjoy the Messianic Banquet from which the 'chosen people' are excluded (Mt. 8 : 11 f). Truly, traditional thinking about cult is turned topsy-turvy by the prophetic preaching of Jesus. For with him "a silent step, tremendous in its silence, is taken from cultic constraint into the freedom of moral action"<sup>15</sup>.

### **Jesus and the Law**

The Jesus who liberates us from the restraints of cult, sets us free from the burden of the Law as well. For though Jesus does not reject the Law outright, he does propose a new and liberating understanding of the law which rids it of its oppressiveness. This new understanding is very different from that of rabbinic Judaism. For the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus the Law was treasured as law (that is, as something decreed) and it was to be observed in a strictly formal way, that is by the faithful execution of everything prescribed, *because it was prescribed*. The obligation of the Law, and the merit that accrued from obeying it thus depended "no longer on content but on formal authority; not what was commanded determined the will of the person, but the fact that it was commanded"<sup>16</sup>. And so innumerable scribes studied the Law night and day, hoping to find, through ingenious and often quite fanciful interpretation, rules of conduct for every possible situation in life; so that in everything he had to do, a man might have a prescribed alternative, by performing which he could practise obedience and earn merit.

Against this legalistic understanding of the Law Jesus reacts sharply. Not only does he reject the 'tradition of the Elders', where this has distorted the spirit of the Law (Mk. 7:9-13), but he even corrects the Torah itself, when he finds it an

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14. Lohmeyer, *op. cit.* (see n. 11 above) 68.

15. Ibid., 72.

16. R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London 1958) 54.

inadequate expression of what man really is (Mk. 10:2-9). Because, for Jesus, the Law is not just positive law, a collection of unrelated and arbitrary precepts, which bind merely because they have been commanded; it is 'natural' law, whose prescriptions grow organically out of the basic needs of human existence, and are binding because they encode the 'natural' conduct of man as creature and child of God.

As such the Law is interpreted far more radically by Jesus than it is by the scribes. Its demands now reach down to the innermost intentions of the heart, and do not stop short at the external performance of an action (Mt. 5:21-47). They embrace a man's life in its entirety (all of it and everything in it), and not only those areas which can be brought under formulated law. And they require not just the avoidance of evil ('thou shalt not'), but a positive, never ending endeavour to do good, which reaches out to the perfection of God himself (Mt. 5:48). Yet these demands are liberating demands. For they are not arbitrary norms imposed on man from outside, but merely spell out for him the implications of the obedience and the love which are his spontaneous response to the acceptance of the Gospel. The Law as radicalized by Jesus (as in the Sermon on the Mount) is therefore not meant to be a collection of decrees telling us to do this or that; it is meant, rather, to be a picture of what we potentially are, what we should be, what we shall become, if only we surrender to the transforming spirit of Jesus. The law of Jesus, then, does not constrain our spirit, but invites us to grow in love. For love is ultimately the essence of the Law, as it is of our being. And all the demands of Jesus come down eventually to this one demand: that a man give himself away wholly in love, so that by losing his life he may truly find it (Mt. 10:39).

So we are not to worry anxiously about the future, piling up treasures on earth (Mt 6:19) or merit in heaven; and striving desparately to keep our record clean, so that, like the one-talent servant in the parable (Mt 25:14-30) we might be 'safe' before an exacting God. That way leads to the scrupulosity and self-righteousness that are the inevitable pathologies of legalism. Rather, the law of Jesus invites us to confront the future with the simplicity and confidence of a child (Mt 18:2-4), fully con-

scious of our sinfulness and need, but with the joyous assurance that we have indeed been forgiven. For the God of Jesus is not the law-giving Judge who remorselessly metes out reward and punishment, according to the merits and demerits we have acquired by our observance or infringement of each tiny precept of the Law. He is *Abba*, our dear Father, who invites (and enables) us to love him and to live according to that love (Lk 15:11-32). Love wholly casts out fear, in Jesus' understanding of the Law.

### **Jesus and his community**

The prophetic preaching of Jesus leads to the formation of a community of disciples, who gather round him in "concentric circles" by responding to his proclamation of the kingdom through conversion and faith.<sup>17</sup> Jesus calls this community (the term of the post-Easter Church) his "little flock" (Lk 12:32), and so sees it as the 'faithful remnant' spoken of by the prophets as those who in the 'last days' are to receive the salvation promised to Israel (Is 10:20f; Jer 31:7; Mic 5:7ff).

Because it grows up around Jesus who comes as the 'eschatological alternative' to law and cult, this new community of the last days is not distinguished primarily by a new law or a new cult. Indeed Jesus and his disciples, and even the post-Easter Palestinian church until its expulsion from the Synagogue towards the end of the first century A. D., continue to live as practising Jews. What distinguishes them is not a new institution, but a new spirit: their faith in Jesus and the spirit of openness, love and hope which grow out of this faith.

For the Jesus - community, unlike other Jewish groups of its time (like the Pharisees or the sectarians of Qumran), is an open community. It is not a closed group restricted to the pious and the respectable, but reaches out to the needy (the poor, the weeping, the hungry of Lk 6:20f), to the socially outcast (the 'tax-collectors and sinners' of Mk 2:15), and to the religiously ignorant (the 'little ones' of Mt 11:25). So the community places its trust not in money, power or prestige, but solely in God, out of whose love and truth it lives. It is therefore, necessarily, a community of truth, love and service. Its language is not that

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17. J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, I (London 1971) 167.

of devious diplomacy or of political compromise, but the plain ‘yes’ and ‘no’ which needs no oath to guarantee its truth (Mt 5: 33-37). Its heart is not set on money and the power that money brings, but on “the kingdom of God and his saving love”, for it knows that God is able and ready to care for its needs (Mt 6: 33). It avoids all ostentation in its piety, knowing that it is not the applause of men but the approval of God that ultimately counts (Mt 6: 1-18).

The community of Jesus is profoundly concerned about the total welfare of all men, for it knows that it is not the will of the Father that even one of his little ones should perish (Mt 18: 14), and that help given to any one in need is given to Jesus himself (Mt 25: 31-46). It steadfastly refuses titles of honour (always subtly corrupting), conscious of itself as a brotherhood which has only one Father in heaven, and only one Master, the Christ (Mt 23: 9 f.). It looks on office as an occasion for service, not as a symbol of status or an instrument of power; for it always has before its eyes the overwhelming example of Jesus who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10: 45).

The community of Jesus is not afraid to proclaim its scandalous gospel that salvation is offered to the undeserving poor (Lk 6: 20f; Mt 11: 5f), in spite of the opposition that the revolutionary thrust of this message invariably arouses among the powerful and the unjust. For it is content to suffer persecution in imitation of its crucified and calumniated Lord (Mt 10: 24f.). The community of Jesus lives in the serene and unruffled hope of a final vindication, because it has the firm assurance that its risen Lord who has overcome death will be with it till the end of time (Mt 28: 20).

This, then, is Jesus’ vision of the community he came to found; this is Jesus’ dream. And a strangely irrelevant dream it must appear to us! For with the stifling ritualism of our worship and the unbridled legalism of our canon law, with all our ecclesiastical careerism, our petty tyrannies, our delight in tinsel titles, and our unceasing clamour for our ‘minority’ rights, with our large neglect of the poor, our shoddy compromises with the powerful, our connivance at injustice, and our worship

of wealth, we are, surely, far indeed from the dream that Jesus dreamed. But this should not discourage us. Poised between the 'already' of the Resurrection and the 'not yet' of the Parousia, the Church of Jesus is a pilgrim church: a community not of the perfect, but of those who are walking towards perfection. The important thing is that we do not stop walking, that we continue to be pulled by Jesus' dream.

And when our complacency and self-righteousness, our cynicism and our sloth, tempt us to put away the dream of Jesus, gently urging us to come to terms with hard reality, to lower our sights to a more realistic goal, then the voice of Jesus the prophet rings out, breaking into our apathy and summoning us to creative action. Jesus will not be satisfied with less than his dream and his urgent demands challenge us still. For Gospels are not dead stories of things long past, but the word of God addressing us here and now. And in them Jesus speaks not to Pharisees long since dead, but to the Pharisee who lurks in each of our hearts. So the Gospels become the abiding conscience of the Church, and in them the voice of Jesus the prophet is raised to challenge us to a permanent revolution, and call us to renewal without end.

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# The Prophetic Element in the Bhagavadgita

## Introduction

One of the commonplaces of research on the *Bhagavadgītā* is that the ideas contained therein are nothing but an unfolding of those existing — at least seminally — in the older Scriptures, namely, the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. This, like all commonplaces, is true only to an extent. What I want to point out — and this is all that is possible in an article of this nature — is that the *Bhagavadgītā* has produced something which is *totally new* to the Veda-Upaniṣad tradition. This contribution consists in the introduction of *bhakti*. Too often, however, the very essence of *bhakti* has been misunderstood by Hindus themselves with the result that it has now come to be identified mainly if not solely with the devotee's attitude of emotional love and attachment to a personal God. This attitude, I feel, is only the *result* of God's love for man. The traditional commentaries on the *Bhagavadgītā* seem to me to overlook the importance of this factor, which I believe to be a 'prophetic element' in the *Bhagavadgītā*, for the reasons given below.

In understanding religions other than one's own one has always to study them in the context of their basic theology, anthropology and cosmology, that is, in the context of their *Weltbild*, world picture. Apparent similarities are often misleading. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, for example, it would be wide off the mark to translate *atma* as soul. The most helpful method for the comparative study of religions is, I believe, that of seeking out not just surface similarities but similar relations and functions. Thus what we normally call soul inasmuch as functions such as thinking and decision-making are attributed to it — corresponds to the *buddhi* of the *Bhagavadgītā*, as R. C. Zaehner has already pointed out. Such a correspondence is based neither on identity nor on mere similarity but on a type of analogy of proportionality. That is to say, the relation between the soul and thinking and decision-making is similar to the relation between *buddhi* and thinking and

decision-making. R. Panikkar who has introduced this principle into the field of hermeneutics has called it 'scientific homology'. "It would be most unrewarding to indulge in mere "comparativisms" between indological concepts and their possible counterparts in other cultures. The notion of homology here suggested applies the geometrical notion of homology to certain series of concepts belonging to different cultures. In geometry homology stands for correlations between points of two different systems in which one point of one system corresponds to a 'homologous' point in the other. This method does not imply, first, that one system is better than the other, nor, secondly, that a point can be interchanged, transplanted as it were, from one system to another. It discovers only homologous correlations" ("Indology as a cross-cultural catalyst", *Numen* XVIII [1971] 177).

Before we apply this principle to prophetism as found in the *Bhagavadgītā*, let us briefly examine the 'function' of prophetism in a religious tradition like the Judeo-Christian one. Here prophetism is seen as both the complement of and a corrective to traditional and institutionalized religion (See Karl Rahner's article on 'Prophetism' in *Sacramentum Mundi* Vol. 5, pp. 110–113). Traditional religion tends by its nature towards institutionalization. By institutionalization I understand the process by which the criterion and the content of faith are 'defined' and the code of behaviour fixed and prescribed. Historically this process began in Christianity with the 'fixing' of the canon of Scripture; it proceeded by 'defining' certain interpretative understandings of Scripture and by issuing immutable norms of morality; it continues to exist to-day in the infallible teaching authority of the Papacy. Prophetism, on the other hand, though a rare phenomenon, has been largely responsible for the various 'spiritual' renewals and the diverse forms of religious life and activity in Christianity. Though prophetism has, not without foundation, been associated with the protest against dead structures, corrupt lives of church leaders, exaggerated forms of piety and extreme formulations of doctrine, its obvious function has been to recall repeatedly to mind that God's initiative of love for man is a free gift, and that therefore, strictly speaking, it cannot be 'earned' or 'merited', much less institutionalized. It is prophetism that will insistently protest against all attempts to

'absolutize' man and his work, and be a reminder that God is *Abba*, our Father, who, because He loves us, makes us lovable.

With that we may now turn to the *Bhagavadgītā* whose popularity has been rightly compared with that of the New Testament. The common opinion among scholars today is that the *Bhagavadgītā* is a pre-Christian, mystical poem with a strong philosophical bias. Its genius consists in its absorption of all the various theological and religious currents of its time. However what raises it to the rank of prophetic books is the fact that *for the first time in the religious tradition of India it puts forward as 'the' message that this is the most important factor in the path of man's liberation (mokṣa)*.

No one reading the *Bhagavadgītā* independently of the various traditional commentaries (which invariably presuppose a particular standpoint) can fail to see that the traditional ways (*mārgas*) leading to *mokṣa* are not merely 'subsumed' (as most Indian writers assert), but are 'put in their place' by a radically new element which transcends them, and in the process reduces them to mere preliminaries. "Not by the Vedas or grim ascetic practice, not by giving of alms or sacrifice can I be seen in such a form as you did see Me..." (R. C. Zachner, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, II, 55. Cfr. also II, 48). And this new element is the 'grace' of the 'God of gods' who alone enables his devotee to 'see Him face to face'.

### **The concept of bhakti in the Bhagavadgītā**

Though this is not the place to go into a detailed scholarly analysis of the text and the main concepts of the *Bhagavadgītā*, it will help to examine, however superficially, the *Bhagavadgītā*'s concept of *bhakti*.

(a) The first reference to *bhakti* appears in Ch. 4 v. 3 in the form of the past participle of the verb *bhaj*.

*sa evāyam mayā te 'dya yogah proktah purātanah /  
bhakto 'si me sakha ceti, rahasyam hy etad uttamam //*

"This same ancient *yoga* is being proclaimed to you by me today, Because this is the supreme secret that you are my *bhakta* and my friend."

The various meanings of the word *bhakta* are: served, honoured, revered, loved, adored, enjoyed, cultivated, participated in. Before we make our choice we must remember that the common element in all these meanings is the passive form. That is to say, the one who is served, honoured, revered, loved, adored, enjoyed, cultivated, participated in, is the 'object'. This shows at once that the usual translation of *bhakta* as 'loyal and devoted' is a derived meaning, since it connotes the active form. Moreover the context seems to prefer the meaning of 'loved by', 'beloved of'. I would accordingly translate the hemistich thus: "Because this is the supreme secret that you are beloved of me and are my friend."

The reason for my opting for this translation is this. The summary of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s doctrine which is given as the parting message is:

*sarva-guhyatamam bhūyah! 'śrnu me paramam vacah /  
iṣṭo 'si me dṛḍham iti, tato vakyāmi te hitam //*

"And now again give ear to this my highest Word, of all the most mysterious: 'I love you well.' Therefore will I tell you your salvation." (Zaehner, 18. 64.)

The parallels are striking:

- (1) *rahasyam uttamam = sarva-guhyatamam paramam vacah*
- (2) *bhakto 'si me sakhā ceti = iṣṭo 'si me dṛḍham iti*
- (3) *sa evāyam mayā te 'dya yogah proktah purātanah =  
tato vakyāmi te hitam.*

It is not a question here of taking two random quotations and trying to prove one's point. The first quotation introduces (in the *Bhagavadgītā*) the *bhakti*-doctrine. It is here said that what is being revealed is the supreme secret, and that this supreme secret consists in the fact that man is the *bhakta* of God. The second quotation is the last word, the parting message of the *Bhagavadgītā*. This message consists in God's revelation of the highest secret which is this: God loves man. This not only confirms the message of Ch. 4. 3 but shows that *bhakta* means *iṣṭa*.

Negatively, one finds confirmation by asking, how at all *bhakta* could mean devotee in Ch. 4. v. 3? Could one meaning

fully defend the thesis that the supreme secret (as enunciated in Ch. 4 v. 3) is: "You are my devotee and friend"? In what way does one need God's revelation to know that one is God's devotee? Where, however, one absolutely needs God's assurance is to know whether God has accepted one's devotion! That God has given this very assurance in Ch. 4. v. 3 is confirmed in Ch. 18 v. 64. It is therefore difficult to see how the statement "you are my devotee and friend" can be the supreme secret. Moreover what should the word 'friend' mean in this context? If, however, *bhakta* is taken to mean 'beloved of', then the word *sakhī* makes sense. Because of this unique relationship of love between God and man, God's calling man His friend becomes part of this relationship of love!

(b) There is a further aspect to the meaning of *bhakta/bhakti*. What we have till now been considering is the 'passive' aspect of *bhakta*. There is however a very important 'active' aspect that has to be considered.

First, it is a fundamental doctrine of the *Bhagavadgītā* that all beings are in God. "In Him do all beings subsist; by Him this universe is spun." (Zaehner, 8. 22) "By Me, Unmanifest in form, all this universe was spun: in Me subsist all beings, I do not subsist in them. And yet contingent beings do not subsist in Me, - behold my sovereign skill-in-works (yoga): my self sustains [all] beings. It does not subsist in them; It causes them to be-and-grow. As in [wide] space subsists the mighty wind blowing [at will] ever and everywhere, so do all contingent beings subsist in Me." (Zaehner, 9. 4-6) What is being taught here is not so much the 'where' of contingent beings as their 'how' and in some sense their 'why'. The point of the first affirmation

*mat-sthāni sarva-bhūtāni, na cāham teṣ्य avasthitah* (9. 4 cd) and the subsequent denial

*na mat-sthāni bhūtāni, paśya me yogam aiśvaram:*

*bhūta-bhṛu, na ca bhūtaṣṭho mamātmā bhūta bhāvanah* (9. 5) is precisely the rejection of any connotation of 'where' being brought in to explain the relation of God and the contingent beings. If God is the sustainer of contingent beings and if He makes them be-and-grow, then what is philosophically meant is

that He is the cause and source of their being. Evidently this is an ontological relation of dependence of the contingent beings on God. When therefore it is said that contingent beings are in God, their relation of absolute dependence on Him is presupposed. Absolute dependence, because it is a dependence of a contingent being for its 'being'.

Secondly, it is also said of the *bhaktas* that they abide in God and God abides in them. "But those who commune with Me in Love's devotion abide in Me, and I in them." (Zaehner, 9. 29) Obviously this type of 'abiding' can only refer to a participation of persons. Persons abide in each other not in the same way in which merely material things abide in God. In the case in question the persons concerned are God and man; hence man participates in God's being not merely ontologically but 'personally', that is, freely and lovingly. When one says that man participates in God's being freely and lovingly, this can only mean that man freely and lovingly accepts God as the cause and source of his being. In other words *bhakti* (as seen in the context of 9. 4-6 and 9. 29) will mean the free and loving acceptance by man of his 'being in God', that is, of his absolute dependence on God. This free, full and loving acceptance of one's dependence on God finds expression in various ways. "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice or give away in alms, whatever penance you may perform, offer it up to Me." (Zaehner, 9. 27) "On Me your mind, on Me your loving service, for Me your sacrifice, to Me be your prostrations: now that you have thus integrated self, your striving bent on Me, to Me you will surely come." (Zaehner, 9. 34) "Do works for Me, make Me your highest goal, be loyal-in-love to Me, cut off all [other] attachments, have no hatred for any being at all: for all who do thus shall come to Me." (Zaehner, II. 55) "But those who cast off all their works on Me, solely intent on Me, and meditate on Me in spiritual exercise, leaving no room for others, [and so really] do Me honour, these will I lift up on high out of the ocean of recurring death, and that right soon for their thoughts are fixed on Me. On Me alone let your mind dwell, stir up your soul to enter Me; thenceforth in very truth in Me you will find your home." (Zaehner, 12. 6-7)

Incidentally these passages also show that it is through *bhakti* that man ‘draws near to God’. And this is not at all astonishing, because ‘integration’, ‘detachment’, ‘sameness-and-indifference’ and ‘renunciation’ are various expressions of the ‘total and loving acceptance of one’s dependence’ on God which is implied by the process of *bhakti*. This is also the reason why (when Kṛṣṇa enumerates on different occasions the means of reaching Him) ‘integration’, ‘detachment’, ‘sameness-and-indifference’, ‘renunciation’ and ‘*bhakti*’ inevitably appear, but in no fixed hierarchy. It is therefore not a matter of mere chance that when God describes the man He loves, He is speaking of one who is busy with ‘integration’, ‘detachment’, etc.

“Let a man feel hatred for no contingent being, let him be friendly, compassionate; let him be done with thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, the same in pleasure as in pain, long-suffering, content and ever integrated, his self restrained, his purpose firm, let his mind and soul be steeped in Me, let him worship Me with love: then will I love him [in return].

That man I love from whom the people do not shrink and who does not shrink from them, who is free from exaltation, fear, impatience and excitement.

I love the man who has no expectation, is pure and skilled, indifferent, who has no worries and gives up all selfish enterprise, loyal-and-devoted to Me.

I love the man who hates not, nor exults, who mourns not, nor desires, who puts away both the pleasant and unpleasant things, who is loyal-devoted-and-devout.

I love the man who is the same to friend and foe, [the same] whether he be respected or despised, the same in heat and cold, in pleasure as in pain, who has put away attachment and remains unmoved by praise or blame, who is taciturn, contented with whatever comes his way, having no home, of steady mind, [but] loyal-devoted-and-devout.

But as for those who reverence these deathless [words] of righteousness which I have just now spoken, putting their faith [in], making Me their goal, my loving-devotees, – these do I love exceedingly.” (Zaehner, 12. 13-20)

What we have said till now is this: the root meaning of *bhakta* in the context of *Bhagavadgītā*'s message is 'beloved of', that is to say, the *bhakta* is 'beloved of' God. *Bhakti* on man's part implies a loving acceptance of his dependence on God. This acceptance means that man must integrate himself, make himself detached from pleasure and pain etc., because only in this way can he, as God wants him, make himself 'fit' for 'entering God'. This finds further corroboration when we study the role of *bhakti* in the context of reaching *mokṣa*, and it is to this that we shall now turn our attention.

### The role of *bhakti* in the path of liberation

Towards the end (18. 49–56) the *Bhagavadgītā* itself gives a summary of the various steps leading to final liberation:

1. "With the mind everywhere unattached, with the self conquered, and devoid of every craving: he achieves the highest Perfection of Actionlessness through Renunciation.
2. Having reached this Perfection, the way he [next] reaches Brahman, that learn of Me, just in brief, O son of Kuntī [for], that is the Highest Consummation of Knowledge.
- 2a. Possessed of chastened intellect, and having controlled the self with firmness, having adjured sound and other objects of sense, and having altogether discarded passion and aversion: Betaking himself to sequestered spot, with frugal fare, and restraining speech, body and mind, ever engaged in concentrate meditation and finding repose in freedom from passion; Egotism, [sense of] strength, pride, desire, wrath and possession: relinquishing these, devoid of "My"-ness, and at peace [within], he comes to realize the oneness of essence with Brahman.
3. Realizing his oneness of essence with Brahman, he, in the serenity of his self, has nothing to grieve for, nothing to long for: and maintaining an even disposition towards all beings, he attains highest Devotion to Me.

Through [that] Devotion he perceives in reality the [infinite] magnitude and essential nature of My being; and so, knowing Me in My real essence, subsequently enters therein.

3 a. And even though – in dependence upon Me – he keeps on ever performing all activities, [nevertheless], through My favour, he wins the Eternal and Immutable Dwelling-place.'"  
 (S. K. Belvalkar, *The Bhagavadgītā*, Poona 1947.)

The three 'steps' are, I think, quite clearly described: (1) reaching the state of *naiṣkarmya-siddhi*, (2) reaching the state of Brahman and (3) entering God.

### (I) The state of *naiṣkarmya siddhi*

*Naiṣkarmya-siddhi* does not consist merely in giving up all work. "Not by leaving works undone does a man win freedom from the bond of works, nor by renunciation alone can he win perfection's prize." (Zaehner, 3.5) Rather it is achieved by "one, who, through the mind, exercises control over the sense-centres and, by his organs of action, O Arjuna, performs the Yoga of Action – free from attachment" (Belvalkar, 3.7). This presupposes the various descriptions of Yoga given in the *Bhagavadgītā*: (a) "Yoga means 'sameness-and-indifference'" (Zaehner, 2.48), (b) "Yoga is also skill in performing works" (Zaehner, 2.50) and (c) "This, he should know, is what is meant by 'spiritual exercise' (*Yoga*) – the unlinking of the link with suffering-and-pain" (Zaehner, 6.23). The aim of Yoga, then, is the control of the senses through the mind, a 'mental' attitude of sameness-and indifference which produces a particular skill in performing works without attachment to their fruits and which leads to the 'unlinking of the link with suffering-and-pain.' Since it is the *buddhi* that is mainly responsible for this 'mental' attitude of sameness-and-indifference by 'controlling' and 'integrating' (i) the mind and (ii) the senses through the mind, the *Bhagavadgītā* calls this process *buddhi-yoga* (2.39-72). It is this *buddhi yoga*, also called *jñāna-yoga* (cfr. 3.3) which leads to *karma yoga* (= 'skill in performing works'). Indeed, even the traditional *bhakti yoga* is subsumed or at least presupposed by *buddhi* or *jñāna*. A detailed description of *jñāna* is given by the *Bhagavadgītā*:

"To shun conceit and tricky ways, to wish none harm, to be long-suffering and upright, to reverence one's teacher, purity, stead-fastness, self-restraint,

Detachment from the senses' objects and no sense of 'I' most certainly, insight into birth, death, old age, disease and pain, and what constitutes their worthlessness,

To be detached and not to cling to sons, wives, houses, and the like, a constant equal-mindedness whatever happens, pleasing or unpleasing,

Unswerving loyalty-and-love for Me with spiritual exercise on other bent, to dwell apart in desert places, to take no pleasure in the company of men,

Constant attention to the wisdom that appertains to self, to see where knowledge or reality must lead, all this is ‘knowledge’...” (Zaehner 13.7-11).

This description of knowledge is nothing but a description of *buddhi-yoga*. Together with the description in 2'39-72 it shows that it is *buddhi-yoga* that leads a man not only to the state of *naiṣkarmya-siddhi* but to the ‘brahmic state’ (=‘the fixed, still state of Brahman’).

### (2) The state of Brahman

Not mere restraint of the senses and indifference towards all dualities (pleasure-pain, heat-cold, etc.) but absence of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ too should be the characteristics of the man ‘fit’ to enter the state of Brahman. In the anthropology of the *Bhagavadgītā* (as in that of Sāṃkhya) ‘I’-ness belongs to the evalutes of *prakṛti* (nature) and therefore needs to be ‘integrated’. This is precisely what *buddhi-yoga* accomplishes. Now *buddhi-yoga* is God’s gift to men who love Him. “To these men who are ever integrated and commune with Me in love I give that integration of the soul (*buddhi-yoga*) by which they draw nigh to Me.” (Zaehner, 10.10) That is to say, men who constantly strive to integrate their whole personality (senses, mind, ‘I’ -ness and *buddhi* and love God with their whole being (*sarva-bhūtena*) will be rewarded with *buddhi-yoga*.

### (3) ‘Entering’ God

Once the Brahmic state has been reached or, more precisely, once God has led man to the Brahmic state one ‘sees the self in all beings, all beings in the self’ (6. 29). Here an extraordinary thing happens. “Who sees Me everywhere, who sees the All in Me, for him I am not lost, nor is he lost to Me” (Zeahner, 6. 30). In the Brahmic state the individual is not lost into anonymity but enters the relationship of selfless love that

(*Bhakti*) develops (in eternity!) between God, the whole, and the self, the part" (Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, p. 31). This is God's gift to man: *parā bhakti* or the highest devotion. Eternity consists therefore in a loving communion between God and man.

Reflecting on the whole 'process' of liberation we discover that *it is God who takes the initiative in loving man and in getting him to respond positively*. This is beautifully summarized by Kṛṣṇa in his parting message to Arjuna: "And now again give ear to this my highest Word, of all the most mysterious: 'I love you well.' Therefore will I tell your salvation. Bear Me in mind, love Me and worship Me sacrifice, prostrate yourself to Me: so will you come to Me, I promise you truly for you are dear to Me" (Zaehner, 18. 64–65). This is the prophetic element in the *Bhagavadgītā* to which I want to draw attention. Among all the ancient writings of Hinduism it is in the *Bhagavadgītā* that for the first time we find this doctrine of God's initiative in loving man. The impersonalistic, monistic view, however, of some of the Upaniṣads has left such an indelible mark on students of the philosophies and religions of India that this 'prophetic element' of the *Bhagavadgītā* has not received the attention it deserves.

I have used the words 'prophetic element' because whatever the validity of the different *mārgas* and *yogas*, one is here reminded that liberation is essentially a gift of God. "But never will you be able to see me with your natural eye. A celestial eye I'll give you, behold my power as Lord!" (Zaehner, 11. 8). Sacrifice, alms-giving and ascetic practices have value only when they are seen as a response to God's initiative of love. "On Me your mind, on Me your loving service, for Me your sacrifice, to Me be your prostrations: now that you have thus integrated self, your striving bent on Me, to me you will surely come." (Zaehner, 9. 34) When all is said and done, it is not the various *mārgas* but God Himself who will lead man to God. "Give up all things of law, turn to Me your only refuge, for I will deliver you from all evils; have no care." (Zaehner, 18. 66)

This is the first 'protest' (that is textually certified) against any attempt to 'absolutize' the different man-made *mārgas* or

*yogas*; indeed it is the first protest (that we know of in India) which makes it abundantly clear that God's love for man is the beginning of man's liberation from the misery of re-birth and re-death. As such the *Bhagavadgītā* is truly the 'gospel' of Hinduism, and a significant chapter in the religious history of mankind.

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## Jesus and the Father

### 1. God-experience

Jesus' dream of a new human community, built on freedom, meaning and love, was born of his personal experience of God. It will come true among us in the measure in which we share in his experience, and recapture and re-live it in our own personal way. The community will be his to the extent it is animated by the God-experience that lay at the basis of his life, and not merely because it is supported from the outside by structures of tradition, law, order and authority.

The God-experience of Jesus was a personal mystery and a historical reality. Its beginnings, like all beginnings, are obscure; they are lost in the twilight of Jesus' childhood. But we know that it grew and developed. "As Jesus grew up, he advanced in wisdom and favour with God and men."<sup>1</sup> As he grew up, and began to live his life more maturely and personally, and came to consider life's numerous possibilities and invitations in order to make his own choices; as he got ever more fully involved in our history and in human needs and struggles; as he worked

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1. Luke 2:52

and suffered for the coming of God's reign among men; and as he learnt obedience day after day in the school of suffering, and went on surrendering himself in faith to God<sup>2</sup>, his experience of God (and of men) kept deepening and developing into something large and rich and beautiful until it came to final blossoming and total clarity in his resurrection.

Everything hinges on the experience Jesus had of God. On it leans his work of revelation and redemption and creation of the new man. "No one has ever seen God", no one has had direct and clear experience of God. The only exception is God's unique Son "who is nearest to his heart". His contact with God is immediate, he has made him known, and has himself become, in his person and his life, the finest exegesis and interpretation and translation of God in the language of the human<sup>3</sup>. No one indeed "knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."<sup>4</sup> The clarity and completeness of the revelation corresponds to the fullness of Jesus' experience of God in his resurrection. According to the New Testament, it is the Risen Jesus that can drive home to his disciples the meaning of the scriptures and the teaching concerning the kingdom of God. Over a fairly long period (forty days) he appeared to them and taught them<sup>5</sup>. It is the risen Jesus that breathes upon them the Spirit of truth who is to teach them everything and lead them to the complete truth<sup>6</sup>.

With his glorification Jesus experienced in his bodily self the fullness of God's truth about man, and was in a position to communicate it to the world. Having received the full revelation and become the first-born from the dead, Jesus is God's prime witness, faithful and true<sup>7</sup>. Therefore he did insist that he spoke only of what he *knew*, and witnessed only to what he had *seen*

2. Hebrews 5:7-9

3. John 1:18

4. Matthew 11:27

5. Luke 24:27, 45-46; Acts 1:3

6. John 14:26; 16:13; 20:22; 3:31-34; 7: 37-39; cf Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8

7. Revelations 1:1, 5; Jn 8:26, 28, 40

and *heard*<sup>8</sup>. In this total experience of his, Jesus roots his visions, and on it he bases his claim to acceptance. In all his teaching he makes direct demands; he is not reporting or interpreting tradition, but confronting men with reality as it lives in his own experience<sup>9</sup>. His revelation is not just verbal; it is in the first place a communication of experience; it is always the Word-made-flesh. Men may come and see, see his glory and believe, feel his healing touch, know the strength and warmth of his encircling arms, live in his company, eat and drink with him, and share in his joys and sorrows and fears<sup>10</sup>. Jesus presented men with reality for their taking. He did not first present them with words and credal formulations. He could leave men to find their own words for God, for himself and for their own destiny. He used words which were things, and not words which were abstractions. Because he is true and is truth, he wanted men to be authentic through contact with reality which they could afterwards name, each perhaps in his own way. What he wanted was faith rather than adherence to beliefs, authenticity rather than conformism. Men should be able, then, in their turn to bring to others an experience for them to take; they should be able to say, "We have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we have looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands".<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Some hints

Jesus' experience of God is not directly and fully described anywhere in the gospels. But many a fine hint is given to show that his words, works, attitudes and concerns were rooted in and sprang from this experience in the centre of his person within the processes of the history to which he belonged. His inner experience is revealed — clearly, obscurely — in what he said and did, in the way he related to men and things, and in his response to life's concrete situations. Perhaps the most significant events and passages in this connection are:

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- 8. Jn 3:11, 31-32; 8:14, 38
  - 9. cf R H Fuller, *Foundations of New Testament Christology*, pp 105-106
  - 10. Jn 1:14, 39; 2:12; Mk 1:41; 2:15-17; 5:23-42; 6:37-43; 10:16; Lk 7:36-50; 15:20; 19:1-10; 22:28, 39-46
  - 11. I Jn 1:1-3

- (1) the happenings that followed the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan<sup>12</sup>;
- (2) his experience of the Spirit who drove him into the wilderness, who filled him and empowered him to bring the good news to the poor and liberation to captives, and in whom Jesus thrilled with joy<sup>13</sup>;
- (3) two prayers of Jesus giving thanks for revelation and for God's ready hearing of his petitions; one of these also claims exceptional knowledge of the Father<sup>14</sup>. To these may be added other references to Jesus' prayer and his teaching on prayer<sup>15</sup>;
- (4) the transfiguration which has certain points of resemblance to the Jordan event<sup>16</sup>;
- (5) Jesus' close contact with and interpretation of nature as they emerge in his reference to birds and flowers, trees, clouds, fields, harvest, light, water, salt and yeast as well as to human activities like sowing, reaping, shepherding, fishing etc. His parables are particularly revelatory of the way he discovered and met God in everyday things<sup>17</sup>;
- (6) the parables of the joy of God in Luke 15, with their implied refrain, such is God;
- (7) the passion-experience as expressed in the agony and prayer in Gethsemane, in the cry of dereliction on the cross and the dying prayer. To this should be added the description of the agony in the fourth gospel<sup>18</sup>; and
- (8) the resurrection narratives with their hints of the new life of Jesus; much of the fourth gospel may be subsumed here<sup>19</sup>.

12. Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–22; Mt 3:13–17

13. Mk 1:10–12; Lk 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21–22

14. Lk 10:21–22; Mt 11:25–27; Jn 11:41–42

15. Mk 1:35; Mt 14:23; Lk 6:12; 11:1–13; 18:1–8

16. Mk 9:1–8; Lk 9:28–36; Mt 17:1–8

17. Mt 6:25–34; 13; Mk 4; Lk 8

18. Mk 14:32–38; Lk 22:40–45; Mt 26:36–46; Mk 15:33–39;  
Lk 23:44–47; Jn 12:27–30

19. Lk 24; Acts 1:1–8; Jn chapters 20–21; 13–17

To the mind of the early christians what mattered for the world's well-being was that span of experience which covered the closing years of Jesus' life, from his baptism in the Jordan to his glorification<sup>20</sup>.

### 3. Thou art my Son

The God-experience of Jesus on the banks of the Jordan (though crowning all that went before it from his childhood onwards) is foundational for his life and ours. There he met God in a unique way. This interior, permanent and evolving event is enshrined and conveyed in a complex of beautiful and powerful symbols. As Jesus stood in prayer after his baptism at the Jordan, "he saw the heavens torn open"; he saw "the Spirit descending upon him"; he heard "a voice from heaven saying, 'Thou art my Son, my Beloved, on thee my favour rests'"<sup>21</sup>.

He saw and heard; he met and felt God; he 'suffered' the Divine. God, disclosing and giving himself, descended on him from above in a total invasion of his being, and emerged within him from below from the foundations of his heart. It was for Jesus an experience of being gathered up, accepted, loved, graced and made much of. The words he heard were experienced as spoken directly, personally, pointedly and intimately into the centre of his spirit. They were about himself, calling him into being again, giving him to himself afresh, and awaking him to a profounder sense of selfhood than ever before. He now knew, felt, received himself as God's Son in an indescribably new way. "Thou art my Son" was a creative word constituting him, in an altogether new manner, what he already was, namely God's Beloved Son. Within this experience of his own dynamic Sonship, Jesus encountered God and received him anew, in an unprecedented way, as his loving Father, ever more loving and ever more Father. This bipolar experience of interpersonal relationship between God and man as between Father and Son is the basis and axis of Jesus' life and work, especially his work of

20. Acts 1:21-22; according to Mark, it is with this period of Jesus' life that the gospel is concerned.

21. Mk 1:10-11

forging new human relationships with which to weave a new community of men.

As a religious experience, a father-son relationship between God and man was known to human groups from the beginning, and has been growing, not of course without vicissitudes, through the course of history. Our fathers prayed in Vedic times, "May Heaven, our Father, send us happiness"; "Thou art our Father, do Thou instruct us like a Father". Their children continued the prayer: "Thou art the Father of the world"; "as father forgives son, as friend forgives his comrade, as lover forgives his beloved, so bear with me, O God"<sup>22</sup>. In Israel the experience was at times expressed with moving tenderness. These traditions now converged on Jesus who, we presume, felt himself as the flaming focal point of this foundational religious experience of mankind. It is likely that many an Old Testament word awoke in his soul, with new resonance and depth of meaning, echoing the voice on the Jordan. "I have loved you with an everlasting love; so I am constant in my affection for you." "How I have carried you all the way to this place as a father carries his son." "When Israel was a boy I loved him... it was I who taught him to walk, I who took him in my arms, and led him with reins of kindness. I lifted him like a child to my cheek, I bent down to feed him." "Is Ephraim then so dear a son to me, a child in whom I delight? I must still remember him, still be deeply moved for him and let my tenderness yearn over him." "Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, or a loving mother the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you."<sup>23</sup>

The Jordan word, as good news and creative assurance of cherished sonship, lived and grew in Jesus and reached a high point of glory in the transfiguration. Once more the voice from heaven was heard, constituting Jesus afresh, at deeper or higher levels, 'my Son the Beloved'. Once more it was an experience of interpersonal relationship of love. Those who would, as the voice directed, listen to Jesus, would be hearing the words of a

22. Rgveda 1.9.7; Yajurveda 37.20; Bhagavadgita 9.17; 11. 43,44.

23. Jer 31:3; Dt 1:31; Hos 11:1-4, Jr 31:9, 20; Is 49:14-15

loved Son speaking of a loving Father<sup>24</sup>. The Jordan experience was to burst into blossom in one of the most beautiful recorded prayers of Jesus. "I thank you, Father," he said, "for hiding these things from the learned and the wise, and revealing them to the simple." As he said it, he exulted in the Holy Spirit and thrilled with joy<sup>25</sup>. More attention than is usual should perhaps be paid to this thrill and joy, this ecstasy and mystical transport of Jesus. The deep-running ecstasy of the Jordan sprouts occasionally into charming fountains of this sort, offering us fresh insights into Jesus' ever-expanding God-experience. The Jordan event itself was so shattering and overwhelming an encounter with God that immediately afterwards Jesus had to retire for many days into the solitude of the desert, there to yield himself to the pressure of the Spirit, to surrender to the joy of being with God, to sort things out and take his bearings anew from the point of view of what had happened to him and in him. Perhaps the still more basic and ultimate ecstasy and the final flowering of the Jordan event is had in the Resurrection. Paul sees in it God's act of constitutive declaration of Jesus' Sonship on the level of the Spirit, the definitive gathering up of the Son and the ultimate experience of being loved<sup>26</sup>.

#### **4. Abba, dear Father**

From such abiding and evolving experiences sprang the specific approach to God that was characteristic of Jesus. Jesus could not have continued to address God in the tradition of his people, and call him Heaven, the Name, the Holy One of Israel, or the One Who Is. He had to use dearer, intimate, familiar terms. Adopting a child's mode of address to his father in a Jewish family, he called God 'Abba', Dad<sup>27</sup>. He was thereby seeking to express and communicate to us something of his own experience of the Divine. He was indicating the quality which personal relationships within his community were to have: warmth and closeness, informality and respect, simplicity and love, far from bureaucratic impersonality, coldness and complications.

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24. Mk 9:1-8. cf Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-22

25. Lk 10:21-22

26. Rm 1:1-3

27. Mk 14:36; CH Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity*, pp 61-62

The Jesus-community was to be created precisely through and within the sharing of this experience of Jesus' Sonship and of God's Abbahood. To everyone who accepted Jesus, he would give power to become God's children, he would give his Spirit enabling him to experience God as dear Father, and bestow on him the miraculous freedom to call him Abba (*Appa* in the languages of South India) in the intimacy of his heart<sup>28</sup>.

Within the expanding circle of the sons of God there was to be equality. Jesus was particularly concerned to preclude all forms of authoritarianism and bossing that would stratify and fragment his community. With severe clarity he said to his disciples: "You must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi.... you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ"<sup>29</sup>. The society of Jesus' dream is a brotherhood emanating from his experience of God as Abba giving himself to him, the Son the Beloved. Any distinctions within the brotherhood, any greatness or leadership, were to consist in and be realized through humble service. The lord-it-over type of authority is banned from the brotherhood by the God who shone in the heart of Jesus<sup>30</sup>. To emphasize and clarify the freedom and equality which were to mark the movement he was initiating, Jesus insisted on a shared experience of friendship. We were no longer to see ourselves as slaves but as his friends and therefore of one another<sup>31</sup>.

## 5. Fascination and terror

The burden of the Jordan event may be interpreted as God's self-gift to Jesus. In complete trust, God put himself and his kingdom and his chances among men into the heart and hands of Jesus. Trust called forth trust and was answered with trust. For Jesus God became one who could be relied upon, and trusted

28. Rm 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7

29. Mt 23:8-10; cf Jer 31:31-34; Col 3:11,16; 2C 8:13-15; A 2:42-45; A 4:32-35

30. Mt 23:11; Lk 22:24-27; Jn 13:4-15; Mt 20:24-28

31. Jn 15:15; Eph 1:4-6

with our precious life; on him we could rest the entire weight of the hopelessness and confusion of our existence as well as our hope for the future. At the darkest and loneliest hours of his earthly existence Jesus would say with simplicity and truth, "Into your hands, Father, I commit my spirit". It was a whole life of trust without anxious thought for the morrow or for a place where to lay his head or for safety from men who sought to take his life, that culminated in such prayer<sup>32</sup>. The tone of his prayers is witness to a life ship-wrecked, anchored, in God. He was absolutely confident of being heard, yet came to learn that God hears us in ways other than we expect<sup>33</sup>. He would share his experience with us and have us too trust in the Father who feeds birds, cares for the sparrow, counts the hair on our head, knows our needs before we are aware of them, and put our life into his hands as the widow put in her mite, and live without fear. That means trust also in one another; and every bureaucratic tradition that can only live on distrust of people and dictation of minutiae stands condemned and rejected.

Precisely because he had trust, Jesus dared to live in the midst of conflicts of high tension. The God he had met on the Jordan and in his prayer was indeed a God of love and tenderness. But what this love implied and through what testing it would put him, Jesus could not have guessed at that hour. As he went to the school of suffering, as he prayed with loud cries and tears, as he was contradicted, despised and rejected, as stones were picked up to be thrown at him; as his soul grew sorrowful to the point of death in a sudden fear and great distress and cried out to be spared, and in answer was only strengthened to endure to the bitter end, he came to sense and see more and more the nature of the love he had encountered and the kind of God he had given his allegiance to. His experience of God was marked not only by love's light and warmth and tenderness, but by its strangeness too, and by the silence and darkness and terror of the Divine. Testing and temptation began soon after the grace of the Jordan. With what deliberation and sustained effort Jesus had to anchor his life in God is clear from the account of the

32. Lk 23:46; Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:22-31; 13:31-33

33. Jn 11:41-42; 16:23; 14:1

way in which he dealt with the recurring temptations of his life<sup>34</sup>. There were also moments when anchorage too was out of question, when his soul was troubled, and he was at a loss to know what to say<sup>35</sup>. On the cross, finally, such experiences of non-God came to a head and wrenched from him the cry, "Why have you deserted me, God?"<sup>36</sup> Here is the torment of a man to whom God is hidden, after having had his tangible nearness; the torment of a man who sees human sufferings while God seems not to care.

Such experiences were not a mere moral discipline but part of God's self-communication. Through them Jesus came to perceive more deeply the profound mystery that is God. When God therefore calls us sons; and we call him Father, we are not using the terms in the usual sense but with other dimensions and far greater density of meaning. The Father who called Jesus Beloved is also experienced as one who would not let the cup of suffering pass from him despite his anguished pleading; one from whom Jesus had the command to lay down his life and take it up again<sup>37</sup>.

The resurrection experience enabled Jesus ultimately to see human sufferings and limitations as not so much a punishment for sin as a place and entrance for God's love active to save<sup>38</sup>. Man is short-sighted; nature has its own ways; from both much pain and frustration result. But God can make them a place for the appearance of his glory, which is man alive, man rebuilt and made whole. God does not prevent death or sickness, or manipulate nature's courses, or take man's place. He lets man and nature work out their gifts and their failings. Then he can intervene to enable man and nature beyond their native limits. In the Resurrection God was experienced as redemptively active

34. Mt 4:1-17

35. Jn 12:27-28; cf Jn 9; Mk 3:6

36. Mk 15:34; cf E Schweizer, *Jesus*, p. 27-28

37. Jn 10:18; 14:31

38. Jn 9:1-3

within suffering as he is creatively present in the seed that falls and dies only to explode into a harvest<sup>39</sup>.

## 6 God for men

Jesus experienced God as God for men. It is God as related to man and active to save him that he meets and gets to know on the banks of the Jordan. There is really no revelation of God and no knowledge of him except in relation to man and his salvation; and there is no going to God without the brother for the experience of God contains also an experience of men. The Father entrusts everything to Jesus for the benefit of men<sup>40</sup>. The Father of Jesus is a God so concerned with men that matters of human well-being have priority in his eyes over matters of cultic worship to himself. His mind as known through Jesus is that mercy comes before sacrifice, and that brotherly relationship with others takes precedence over ritual offering to God<sup>41</sup>.

This experience lies at the basis of Jesus' conception of the new community. The dream rests on a sense of God whose thoughts are with men and for men, for all who need to be made whole not with oppressive systems of religion but with the uplifting and liberating power of the Spirit of love. The community is built on God who knows that salvation is costly and bears the whole cost of it himself: God who sacrifices himself and would not destroy man to save any formula or dogma or theology or structure or law or rite; who would not drive us like cattle but would have us make our decisions and build our world. And if he calls us to suffering, it is not for a squalid, masochist stunting of the spirit that the call is issued, but for meaningful suffering inherent in a virile struggle for justice and dignity and freedom for all men.

The Jesus-community begins to emerge at the point where God is seen as one who comes to us and becomes a fact on earth (and not mere hearsay) in the Man Jesus. All who meet him there also meet and accept one another in a reciprocity of respon-

39. Jn 12:24-26

40. Lk 10:22; Jn 3:35

41. Mt 9:13; 12:7; 5:23; Hos 6:6

sibility and love. Rooted in the 'Thou' the Father addressed to Jesus, is the special way in which Jesus treated men and would have men treat one another. To Jesus each man was unique, each situation was particular. To each he reacted and responded in a singularly personal way. Men were not numbers or general principles but persons to be honoured with love and with summons to decision. Jesus told one to follow him, another to return home; directed one to sell everything, another to distribute half his wealth. The approach was concrete, existential, personal, very different from bureaucratic centralization and manipulation of men as cogs in the wheel of a huge institutional machinery. It was only with men of personal maturity, and not of mere social conformity, that the community of his dream could be built<sup>42</sup>.

To build the community was with Jesus an over-arching concern. According to the fourth Gospel, it was to gather together in unity the scattered sons of God that Jesus gave his life. His view was universal and his horizon large. Worship was not only decentralized, but wholly delocalized; finer faith is found outside the Israelite church than inside it: the kingdom is kept open to men from the east and the west; grace is extended to sinners and outcasts, and all restrictive laws and traditions are broken down in an upsurge of the joy of God. Jesus' own family is no longer defined in terms of restrictive biology or religious tenets, but in terms of obedience to God which has universal scope: any man, any woman may become Jesus' brother and sister and mother<sup>43</sup>. Here was evolving a universal community of brotherhood and grace. Such a thing could not be easily organized or officially grasped and controlled. Therefore Judaism felt threatened, the Jewish way of life was in danger. For the Jew religious and national solidarity were inseparable. Anyone who stood for a non-national, universal religion was undermining both nation and religion<sup>44</sup>. That is what Jesus was doing when he cleansed the temple to make it a house of prayer for all nations instead of leaving it to be the stronghold of power for

42. Lk 9:57-62; 19:1-10; Mk 5:18-20

43. Jn 4:24-26; Mt 8:5-13; 9:9-13; Lk 11:27-28; Mk 3:31-35

44. Jn 11:54; C H Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity*, pp 77-78

a faction<sup>45</sup>. The will of Jesus expressed here with such clarity and power is normative for the movement he set afoot and for the fellowship his Spirit keeps shaping.

## 7. God of the poor

The foundations of the new Israel are laid not in nationhood or law, in temple or creed or ritual but in humble love for one another and in the experience of a humble God. God never crushes Jesus or any man with the weight of his glory nor compels any with irresistible proofs. The Jordan experience occurs in the hiddenness of Jesus' heart, in the twilight of faith, in the ambiguity of symbols. After that God's presence to us is the simple presence of a man. His word of power is the lowly and controverted words of Jesus. His power is seen in miracles which are not proofs but signs, and depend on faith for appreciation. Neither the divinity nor the resurrection of Jesus can be scientifically proved and certified. There can only be the certitude of personal experience and of love offered and received. "God exposes himself to scepticism, doubt and disbelief, renouncing anything that would compel men to believe" or would tarnish the purity of that act of freedom which is faith and love<sup>46</sup>.

These facts are big with consequences for the community of Jesus. In fact the first community of disciples did not get the assurance by means of any demonstrable miracle. Their assurance and understanding of the person of Jesus and the events of Easter grew in depth and sensitivity by living under the dominion of the Risen Lord through years of service and suffering, by accepting more and more the visions and invitations of his parables. From Jordan days Jesus knew that God was present in the world not in the splendour and pomp of kings and courts but in his own simple lowly person, and would continue to be present on earth in the humble persons of his disciples, and would move among the wretched of the earth. He knew and we ought to know that "the coming of the kingdom of God does not admit of observation; there will be no one to say, 'look here,

45. of C H Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 146

46. E Schweizer, *Jesus*, p. 49

look there'"<sup>47</sup>. For the kingdom is in the world as salt is in food, yeast in dough, or light and fragrance in the atmosphere. In history God is small, hidden, almost wretched, contradicted, threatened, defenceless, silent and yet present, unforgettable and active in the power of his weakness.

Part of Jesus' experience is that God sees his own greatness in serving man. Jesus knew that in and through his own humble service God was continually seeking to come to human expression. It is because of a particular experience of God and a particular conception of him that Jesus himself comes to serve and not to dominate or control or conquer; that he comes to wash men's feet and carry out his ministry in association with the lowly, the despised and the disinherited, sharing life with the homeless poor, rejected and despised by men of wealth and power. It is because of a particular experience of God that Jesus insists on his disciples eschewing all ambition and all desire to lord it over others. Who is the greatest? His answer consisted in kneeling to his disciples, in pointing to children, in teaching the choice of the lowest seat, in rejecting the temptation of power, in defining authority as leadership in service and in making himself bread broken and handed round. What has been the answer of the historical community that claims to be his?

### **8. The Lover of our world**

The God of Jesus' Jordan experience is someone who is in love with the world, bending over it in tenderness, tearing open his own mystery to reveal his heart to it, giving himself to it in an outpouring of his gentle Spirit and addressing to it words of rarest endearment. It is God in his manwardness and worldwardness that Jesus encounters in the centre of his own spirit; God in his relationship of self-disclosure and self-giving. His love does not calculate but goes beyond all measure. It is so royal and free that it cannot be blocked or fettered, detoured or conditioned by human caprice. On good men and bad men, on those who love and those who hate or care not, God conti-

-47. Lk 17:20-21

nues to cause His sun to shine and His rain to fall<sup>48</sup>. This experience of Jesus too passes into his dream of the new world. His community, as a movement of friendship, is to live by love that cuts across frontiers and knows no limits, cherishes enemies and prays for persecutors and killers. Service shall no more be self-regarding or reward-counting but shall be abundant, outgoing and free. Love so exceptional was to be the hallmark of his fellowship because such was the love of him who had said to him on the Jordan, and through him to the world, 'You are my Beloved'.

From within this experience and its living memory, the heart of Jesus looked out on the world and saw in nature and the simple realities of human life the face of God, the finger of the Father, the presence of his love, the exuberance of his creative fantasy, the signs of his mystery. We could imagine Jesus seated quietly on the grass under a tree in the warm afternoons, or on the shores of the lake in the evening, gazing at the miracle of a tiny flower at his feet or watching the birds over the waters and deeply stirred by the love that bears and cares for every little creature. We could see him join the farmer sowing in the field; or the fisherman casting his net, or the housewife mixing yeast in flour, sensing the while in all such things the throb of God's redemptive mystery. It was not only at the root and centre of his own person that Jesus met God but in the heart of everyday realities and everyday life. He saw things and events as addressed by God to openness and, therefore as live and big with response to him. The world and history were to Jesus an unfolding, though chequered, word of God's ingathering love. Hence the beautiful New Testament commandments, Look at the birds, Think of the flowers, Take the figtree for a parable, Look around on fields ripe for harvest, or Let the children come to me<sup>49</sup>. We are invited to respond to God through contemplation and creativity, and to transcend all dichotomy of the sacred and the secular. What persons and places were sacred for Jesus and what were not sacred? Who were allowed to come to him and touch him, and who were

48. Jn 3:16, 34; Mt 6:25-34; 10:29-31; 20:9; Ps 145:15-16;  
147:9; 104:27-28; Mt 5:43-48

49. Mt 6:26-28; Mk 13:28; Lk 18:16; Jn 4:35

forbidden? What localities did he deem infradig or indecent or unworthy of his presence? Where would he refuse to go and to whom would he refuse fellowship and communion? For Jesus the temple was everywhere, the temple was man. And the grace of God was always welling up in the heart of simple daily things.

### 9. The reign of God

In everything he said and did, Jesus bore witness to God. He knew that day after day God was making him the expression and historical transposition of his own Self. He knew that in him God was summoning men to decision and that his presence was a turning point for men's lives. His coming therefore marked the final irruption or emergence of the reign of God, which for Jesus is a central value.

He experienced the kingdom as pressing upon him and upon history. It was near, it had already come upon the world. In Jesus' preaching, parables, exorcisms and miracles and in his new way of relating to men, the kingdom was present and was becoming a historical reality<sup>50</sup>. It is the rule of God that transforms men into a community with a special quality of life. Jesus once spoke of rebuilding the destroyed temple. The temple was the symbol of a way of religion and of a community embodying it. The cleansed temple and the rebuilt temple are symbols of the new community in which there was to be no distinction of Jew or gentile, no privileged classes, no marginalized men. The principle of the new community is the Spirit and the love put by God into every heart that is obedient in faith. That means every heart becomes a centre, and unity is secured through mutual openness of everyone to everyone else and the readiness to breathe to another the Spirit God has breathed to each. Each person is a centre for all, and the presidency belongs to the Spirit who is Christ's and who dwells within all, teaching each heart and bearing witness from heart to heart. For in the days of the new covenant "there will be no further need for neighbour to try to

(50) Lk 11:20; Mk 1:15; cf R H Fuller, *Foundations of New Testament Christology*, p. 205

'teach neighbour... they will all know me, the least no less than the greatest'<sup>51</sup>.

The community was embodied in Jesus' own person. He was its seed. He experienced himself as socially potent, as enshrinning the harvest of a new humanity. If lifted up he would draw all men to himself; in his death and resurrection the life-power held within him would be released<sup>52</sup>. His authority to draw men and give them ultimate hope as to the outcome and meaning of life comes from his self-giving death. For in his experience, God's own authority consists not in some external title or status or position but in the fact that he loves and serves. God's power is felt by Jesus not as jurisdiction or institutional government but as humble service of life. Authority is no label. It has to earn and maintain itself everyday by responding authentically to the purpose by which it is defined. The authority of Jesus too is not jurisdiction; but the power to lay down his life and take it up again for us. Hence it is that the kingdom and its ecclesial realizations are not a matter of law and organization but of justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit<sup>53</sup>.

## 10. Going radical

Jesus' God-experience that developed from his baptism to his resurrection was more than enough to show how radical God was in his approach to the world, in his self-gift to man, his disclosure of love, and his redemptive plans. God goes to the root of things, and knows no half measures. It was evident to Jesus that his own response had to be equally radical. Hence his radical obedience even unto death, the death on a cross. His dedication to God's will was complete, and complete was his devotion to the cause of human freedom and wholeness. Human wholeness in fact was the Father's will. Jesus went all out and spared no pains in carrying out the divine plan for the salvation of the world.

51. Jer 31:31-34; Jn 16:13; 14:17, 26; 15:26-27

52. Jn 12:31-35

53. Rom 14:17

To God's radical love and Jesus' own radical obedience correspond the radical demands they make on us: that we renounce all selfishness, that we be ready to offer everything, that we wash one another's feet, that we risk our life for the liberation, dignity, freedom and well-being of every brother, of the broken neighbour, and of the oppressed and dishonoured masses.

The movement Jesus started is a movement of radical love and radical action in favour of men and of basic human values which make life worthwhile, and for which God gave himself and went to extremes in Jesus Christ.

Delhi

Samuel Rayan

# Experience of God in Hinduism

## Introduction

"The dominant character of the Indian mind which has coloured all its culture and moulded all its thoughts is the spiritual tendency. Spiritual experience is the foundation of India's rich cultural history," writes Dr Radhakrishnan in the Introduction to his *History of Indian Philosophy*. Again in his *Hindu View of Life* he says: "The one fact of life in India is the Eternal Being of God." Such statements abound in Dr Radhakrishnan's writings. But they are not just typical of him. Most of the contemporary educated writers and interpreters of Hinduism do make the claim that the source from which Hinduism draws its life-giving waters is the experience of the Divine.

Hinduism has no founder whose personality and teaching could be the centre of its life and activity. Neither has Hinduism a strict religious organization to ensure its permanence in history and to safeguard its orthodoxy and orthopraxis. It has no dogmas binding on all. Even the *Sruti* texts, though accepted by all the Hindus as authoritative, still have no official binding interpretation. So the only source of its origin, vitality and strength, and its impetus for self-renewal is to be sought in the spiritual experience of the 'saints' who have been thrown up by the vast ocean of Hinduism from time to time and who have become the guides and beaconlights of the people who follow them.

Many of the above statements are not of course the whole truth. The rigid and all-inclusive caste system in its varied forms, the traditional and unquestioned acceptance of the authority of *Sruti*, of *karma-samsara* etc, the scrupulous adherence to sectarian doctrines and practices, persist even to our days and make Hinduism as it exists now a parliament of religions. Nevertheless we propose to examine and establish just one point: The experience of God is at the origin of religious men and movements in Hinduism.

As the statement stands, any religious movement, any religious man, can claim that it or he too springs from and is nourished by the experience of the Divine. Yet the history of Hinduism manifests certain unique features. Organization as it is understood in Christianity with hierarchical structures, publicly proclaimed dogmas, religious authority with powers to coerce the erring, a central body claiming the right to interpret the scriptures in an authoritative and binding manner, and extreme care and watchfulness to ensure a uniform belief and practice, are surely absent in Hinduism. Even the rigid caste organizations remain more on the level of external religio-social customs and do not touch the deepest religious experiences of the Hindus. Yet the staying power of Hinduism, its innate capacity to assimilate and transform alien doctrines and practices is amazing. In spite of its socio-cultural closedness and compactness, it keeps a religious openness and tolerance that must invite our consideration. In the varied and often turbulent history of Hinduism, its great religious men have been experimenters with Truth. From the zest for life and the enthusiastic and nature-centred sacrificial religion of the vedic Aryans, through the inwardness of the Upaniṣadic sages and the later God-centred Bhakti religions, Hinduism has taken so many forms, slowly assimilated so many foreign currents till our own days. Even the renaissance movements are no exception to this main rule. At the root of this bewildering growth and (to a logical and systematic mind, baffling) on-going process, there lies what the Hindu calls *anubhava* or *anubhūti* (experience).

"If Lord, thou thinkest that I am able to look upon it, then do thou, Lord of Power, reveal to me thy Self immutable." (Bg. Gita. XI. 3) "I crave to behold that form of Thine as Lord, Person Supreme." (Ibid. 3) To see God has been and is the craving, the quest and the goal of every true Hindu. "Have you seen God?", "Have you experienced the Lord?", are questions which we often hear in India. Even in 1974 literally thousands of people flock round the great sannyāsins and sadhus, not so much to hear them as to have their *darśana* (sight). By seeing them the ordinary man experiences the divine indirectly.

The great anxiety and concern to discover God and not only to hear about him but to feel and to realize the Divine

within and without, to possess the direct awareness of the Absolute, the ground of all, without images and concepts, form the unbroken thread running through the long history of Hinduism. Real religious training – not the purely ritualistic and cultic training of the temple priests – is nothing but an education in God-experience. The *guru*, a man of realization, has to lead his disciple to reach the same *anubhava* as he has had. To make the above statements is not to deny the fact that stark materialism, almost total immersion in the affairs of the world, an appalling lack of social sense, an insistence on external observances and purity at the expense of inner life and dispositions, dominated and still dominate the life and activity of many Hindus. Nevertheless, it may once again be stated that we are here concerned with the life-giving source of what is best in Hinduism.

### **Upanisadic experience of the Absolute**

To enter into the spirit of the Upaniṣads, the most important early Indian testimony regarding the quest after the Absolute in the interiority of man, we need to be initiated into a new way of thinking – a way of progressive interiorization, a conscious effort to pass beyond words, concepts and categories of ordinary thought. The Upaniṣadic sages were at pains to realize the ground principle of all; that which is the root of thought, of breath, of speech, sight and hearing, that which is their origin and that which sets them in motion (Kena 1-7). Their quest centred round the ‘unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the ununderstood understander’ (Br. Up. III. 8. 11); the reality of all realities, Brahman. This reality pervades the whole universe (Is Up 1). It is the innermost depth of man. It is the finest essence—the whole universe has it as its Self. That is the Real: that is the Self and that you are’ (Ch. Up. VI. 8. 7 ff).

It is true that the Upaniṣads do not convey to us a uniform Brahman-experience. Various and even conflicting experiences and expressions are to be found not merely in the various Upaniṣads, but even in one and the same Upaniṣad. But the overwhelming desire of the sages is their craving to experience Brahman. The Brahman-realization sought after by the sages is that whereby people hope to attain each and everything (Br. Up.

1.4.9) which rids them of all sorrow and error; not to attempt to win it amounts to suicide and a life of blind darkness for ever afterwards. To know it is to attain all desires; "Brahman-experience frees man from all fear." (Tait Up II. 1, 4, 5.) No calamity could be greater than the absence of this realization (Kena. II. 5).

For the ancient sages, to know, to realize or to experience was to become that realized reality. To know Brahman is to become Brahman.

To attain the realization of Brahman, long concentration, penance and detachment from the sensible are necessary. Ethical demands cannot be left aside by an aspirant of Brahman realization (Katha Up I. 26 ff; II. 1 ff Mun Up III. 1. 8). Neither long expositions, nor learning or reasoning can enable one to reach Brahman; only the one with strength, endurance and purity, and one to whom the Atman chooses to reveal itself, can realize the Supreme (Kath Up. II. 9, 23; Mun Up. III. 1. 8-9). Again Kath Up II. 20 says: "The man without desire, sorrow spent, beholds It, the majesty of the Self by the grace of the Creator!"

According to the Upaniṣads no one can experience the Divine without the help of a Guru. The Brahman or Atman experience that an aspirant gains under the guidance of an *Acarya* places him beyond all earthly differences and relations (Br. Up IV. 3, 22) and enables him to reach bliss beyond all description (Tait. Up. II. 8, 9). The Upaniṣads already bear testimony to a rich and varied 'God experience' and to different ways of reaching it. The Absolute is experienced as the ultimate and immanent ground of everything and of oneself. It is realized beyond all relationship as permanent, self luminous bliss reality. This relationless reality is non-different from the realizer. To reach this one needs to delve deeper and deeper into oneself, strip off all the veils of the ordinary levels of existence including that of the *ego*.

This experience of the Supreme, which is a transition from the non-self to the Self, from the non-conscious to consciousness, and thence to the supreme consciousness, is a process of detachment and unselfishness.

The Absolute is realized as the indwelling and all-pervading principle of all; as the shining Light in whose shining all things shine and whose radiance is reflected by the whole world. Here the 'sage' is so bathed in the life and light of the Divine, that in the realities surrounding him he sees the Supreme. Again the Absolute is experienced as the one who chooses, who gives grace, who graciously reveals himself to the person fit to receive the manifestation. Together with this realization there is the firm conviction that vain learning, external rituals and selfish efforts cannot bring one this beatifying experience. Love is at the root of God-experience (Sv. Up VI. 23). The Brahman realization takes the person into the inner sanctuary of the Supreme, the Being beyond all predication, yet the fullness of reality; it transforms the experience; he intuits his oneness with the Supreme; it makes the realizer see himself as flowing from, living by, and flowing back into the one source of bliss and existence.

The Upaniṣadic experience of God was limited to a privileged few and communicated to a very limited number of Brahmin disciples. In the history of India's religious experience, it is in the lives of the Buddha and Mahavira we find the compellingly social thrust of God-experience. According to tradition, both these men spent years and years in austerity and prayer with and without the help of teachers in search of the Supreme Truth. Their 'great awakening' was an experience beyond description, an entrance into the inner Truth, a glimpse into the depth of the Reality beyond the sensible, the changing and the mortal. We cannot understand or explain the life and activity of these two religious leaders or the success of their preaching without accepting the fact that they were men of spiritual realization.

### **The Bhagavadgita experience of God**

The major part of the Bhagavad Gītā is nothing but a stirring testimony of the experience of the loving and self-manifesting God to his *bhakta*. Kṛṣṇa who is in front of Arjuna in human form, who is his friend, charioteer, counsellor and teacher is the beginningless Being. He takes birth from time to time to protect the good and put down evil. He is the All-powerful, the source of all, the essence of all beings, the one beyond Brahman, the Supreme, the centre of all Deity, the transcendent and imma-

nent Reality, the all-pervading and universal Lord, terrible yet loving and tender, whose lowly human form is scorned by fools. The *tremendum* yet *fascinosum*, the glorious and majestic yet the lowly, the infinite yet gracious and loving: such is the unutterable and overwhelming experience of Arjuna. This intense, overpowering realization surges out of the depth of the soul in exquisite poetry that can give even us a distant glimpse of God.

"Now have I seen what none has seen before; therefore am I delighted though my heart quakes with fear. Show me that other form, Oh Lord of heaven; be gracious, Lord of heavenly lords, Home of the Universe." (XI. 45) "Grace have I shown to thee, Oh Arjuna, revealing to thee by my own power this very form supreme, glorious, universal, infinite and primal, which none save thee has ever seen." (Ibid. 47) None but Arjuna has seen that divine Form and that not by study, sacred rites or austerities, but by undivided devotion (Ibid. 49, 52, 54). This experience of the Bhagavān is a knowledge, a vision, an entrance into the divine (Ibid. 54). It is an ascent. "By giving up the ego, force, pride, lust, anger and greed, with no thought of 'mine', at peace, so is a man fitted to become Brahman. Become Brahman, his soul is stilled, he grieves not, nor does he desire. Feeling equanimity towards all creatures, he receives the highest (gift) of loving devotion to me. By loving devotion he comes to know me as I am, how great I am and who. Thence once he has come to know me as I am, forthwith he comes to me." (XVIII. 53-57) Through this experience, "destroyed is Arjuna's delusion; he has gained remembrance of the Truth, he stands serene without doubt, ready to do the Lord's word" (XVII. 73).

In this Gitā-realization of God as substantial love, and the discovery of one's real self by the negation of all selfishness, the world is not negated. God who is eternally perfect and self-fulfilled does continue to act. Without his activity the worlds will run down, there will be chaos and the creatures will be destroyed (III. 22-24). God cares for the world, and man on his side must act. He has his duties to the world around him and to other human beings and to himself. The Gitā-experience of God is all-embracing, in which the Absolute and the relative, the Supreme Person and the finite person, find harmony in tension,

unity in diversity, through an all-embracing and out-flowing and in-flowing divine love.

The Upaniṣadic and Gita experiences of the Absolute in fact form the foundational experiences of Hinduism. The Advaitic experience is rooted in the early Upaniṣads, whereas the more theistic God-experience must be traced back to the later Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. The wealth of religious realization contained in the great Bhakti texts forms nothing more than ever-expanding circles whose centre is the inner experience of an infinitely loving God, whose uplifting grace wipes away the sinfulness of man who is eternally dependent on him. The meeting between man and God is a real dialogue.

### **The Advaitic experience**

The Advaitic experience of the Absolute does not take place in a dialogue. Praise and thanks offered to God, confession of one's sinfulness, contemplation of God separate from the contemplator, anything in short that brings in distinction pertains to a lower plane; it is anthropomorphism. The Advaitic realization is the seeing of the total Reality, the sole Reality into which the 'I' will disappear.

The Advaitic experience which, at least in its formulation, teaches the total unreality of the world (e. g. *Prakāśānanda*) does not seem to correspond fully with the intentions of the Upaniṣads or of the great Master Sankara. The genuine Advaita is based on the experience that (a) unity, permanence and reality underlie the many, the changing and the apparent realities; (b) there is the utter dependence and relativity of the many in relation to the Absolute; (c) the ineffable, unrelated Brahman is *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*, beyond all predication, from whose supreme eminence everything vanishes into nothingness.

Such an experience of the Absolute has been confined to a small group of sages in the history of Hinduism. Even in the testimonies of their experience, which surely is ineffable, they do not always remain on the Advaitic plane. The dialogical and the non-dialogical mingle into one stream.

### The Bhakti experience

In the post Bhagavad Gita period, the Bhakti experience of God in numberless shades and colours is testified to in the lives and writings of the great Vaiṣnavite, Saivite and Śāktā sages. It is impossible to do even the minimum justice to these rich 'mystical movements' in this short essay. What we can attempt here is only a few remarks with some illustrations.

In the popular belief as expressed in the legendary biographies of the Bhaktas, and in their own writings, 'God-experience' forms the core of their life and activity.'

In their lives they are credited with the vision of the supreme person or the divine mother in dreams, in the form of the Guru, in the images of the Deity they worshipped, in the ecstasy of group-singing and in the higher states of contemplation. They are said to have experienced the presence and power of God in persecution and calamities, in love and in the cleansing away of their sins. Their own writings bear witness to these 'inner truths'. Just to take a few examples: Tukārām sings of his experience of personal sinfulness, delusion, ambition, greed, feebleness and low birth. Yet at the touch of God, at the sight of his feet, at the realization of God who is the soul of every soul, ever near us both within and without is Tukka purged clear of his impurities. God is now the guide, the mother, the bliss and peace of his life. "Let us see God, let us stand on a high place to behold him. He who once has seen God fears nothing." The Saivite Mānikkavāsagar sings: "My God-Guru, the peerless gem of lustrous light, impregnated me with divine love and cut asunder all earthly ties and made me his own and led me to the rock of grace, from whence I contacted directly the Sun of my soul." Again he says: "I saw him, yes, I saw the fount of grace. At the touch of felicity my happiness knew no bounds."

In the great Saktas God-experience effects an upsetting, a reversion of the old accepted values; there is the beginning of a 'new life' in the bhakta, a 'new mode of experiencing one's reality and the realities surrounding him. For example these men rejected such sacrosanct things as external religious rites, caste rules and regulations, and ordinary religious knowledge. Kabir,

for example, says: "Rites and ceremonies have no worth at all." Ascetical practices, "sitting on the air, studying the Yoga, Vedas, rites and astrology, they are demented." Kabir says the hope of the Yogi and the Jangama is withered. "Put away thy devotional attitudes and thy suspension of breath: Abandon deception and ever worship God." The transformation of life experienced by the bhakta is beautifully expressed by Mānikkavāsagar: "My compassionate Father! Thou transmuted me in grace into thy likeness in bliss." "Every part of me, He fills with love and bliss supreme. He makes all my actions his actions, seeing through his compassion, we see the Father in all things around."

Very often even the bhakti experience of God passes beyond dialogue into silence, beyond confession and prayer into vision, and beyond distinction into complete merging. "Sakti in Siva, Siva in Sakti, they in me, I in them so that we may all be one with thee" is the wish of Mānikkavāsagar. Tukkaram sings: "To me everything is thy name; incense and lights are Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Hari. The outer world is Vitthal; God and his worshippers are not distinct. Thou art my form; I, beyond doubt, am thy form." "If we search deeply, O God, we shall find," says Tukka, "that we are different in name only."

But more often the Bhakta experiences God as his Father, Mother, Brother, Lover, Teacher and so forth.

### **Modern period**

The Hindu experience of God has not ended with the advent of the modern period. Rāmakṛṣṇa, Vivekānanda, Gandhi, Aurobindo and Ramaṇamaharṣi, just to give a few names, have directly or indirectly claimed to have had the privilege of experiencing God. In fact the whole life of Rāmakṛṣṇa was nothing but an insatiable yearning for the vision of God. He describes his first great experience of the Mother thus: "I was then suffering from excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with the vision of the Mother. I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered by a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to realize her in this life. I could not bear the separation any longer: life did not seem worth living. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. Determined to put an end to

my life, I jumped up like a mad man and seized it, when suddenly the blessed Mother revealed herself to me and I fell unconscious on the floor. What happened after that externally or how that day or the next passed, I do not know, but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother." We can multiply such quotations from the sayings of Rāmakṛṣṇa. But the sentences quoted above give us an idea of the God-experience of this modern sage.

Vivekānanda himself bears witness to the transformation that took place in him at the touch of his master Rāmakṛṣṇa. Again we find the description of a divine experience he had in the Kāli temple. "Reaching the temple, as I cast my eyes on the image, I actually found that the divine Mother was living and conscious, the perennial fountain of divine love and beauty: I was caught up in a surging wave of devotion and love.... A serene peace reigned in my heart. The world was forgotten. Only the divine Mother shone in my heart." Whatever be one's opinion of Vivekānanda's life and sayings after his travel to the West, we cannot doubt that during the life-time of his master, he was a person in quest after the Divine.

Aurobindo's vision of the Bhagavān in prison, which in fact forms the real source of his later life and activity, is too well known to need quoting here. Gandhi, as is well known, lived and worked in and through the power of Truth. Gandhi never claims that he comprehended Truth. But in the finite truths he gained glimpses of the Supreme. He writes: "There is an indefinable, mysterious power that pervades everything. I feel it though I do not see it." He speaks of the need for prayer as greater than that for the air he breathes. He was not an ecstatic; he did not think that the Himālayas alone could afford a worthy place of God-experience. In creation, in the humanity surrounding him he found Truth. As Nehru says: "Often the Unknown stared at us through his eyes, because he lived with such intensity in the presence and power of Truth."

In Ramaṇamaharshi we have the reappearance of the Advaitic experience in the 20th century. In his younger days he was not initiated into Advaitic thought. Yet even as a boy as he underwent his famous death in imagination, his experience centred

round the Self that alone is. He lived in "pure consciousness, transcendent being and absolute bliss."

The source of the Rāmakṛṣṇa Movement must be traced back to the God-experience of Rāmakṛṣṇa and Vivekānanda. Rāmakṛṣṇa used to say: "I know what people mean by helping them (poor). To feed a number of persons, to treat them when they are sick..... these are good deeds, no doubt but trifling in comparison with the vastness of the universe!..... God alone can look after the world. Let a man first realize him. Let him get the authority and endowed with his power; then and then alone, he can think of doing good to others. A man should first be purged of all egoism. Then alone will the blissful Mother ask him to work for others."

The absolute primacy of God embraces world and men. Genuine love and service of others must spring from God-realization. This forms the essence of Rāmakṛṣṇa's experience. Vivekānanda formulated this experience forcefully and put it into action. He writes: "At Cape Comorin, sitting in Mother Kumāri's temple, sitting on the last bit of India's rock, I hit upon a plan. We are so many *sannyāsins* wandering about and teaching the people metaphysics. It is all madness. Did not Rāmakṛṣṇa use to say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion.'..... Suppose some disinterested sannyāsins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the *candāla* through oral teaching, and by means of maps, cameras...., can't that bring forth good in time?.... We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses."

The purpose of the Rāmakṛṣṇa Movement is to live the experience of Rāmakṛṣṇa and to perpetuate it in history. At the same time it intends to bear witness to this inner experience by social action and by the propagation of Hindu values.

The Bengali National Movement in its early stages was coloured by the 'śākta-experience of the exuberant creative power and tender love of the universal Mother'. To many of the great national leaders India was the embodiment, the expression, of the Divine Mother. Her subjugation by a foreign power was to

them an insult to the Deity. In fact in the early period, nationalism and Hindu religious experience inextricably intermingled.

Again Gandhiji's socio-political efforts, his vision of *sarvodaya* based on *ahimsa*, *satyagraha*, *svadeshi* and *brahmacharya* cannot be understood or explained apart from his relentless search after Truth and his experience of God as Truth. While describing the essence of Hinduism, Gandhi says (quoting the *Isha Up.*): "All that we see in this great universe is permeated by God. Renounce it and enjoy it. Do not covet anybody's wealth." This was also Gandhi's intimate experience.

About his experience of Truth he writes: "I know, too, that I shall never know God, if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself. I am fortified in the belief by my own humble and limited experience. The purer I try to be, the nearer I feel to be to God." Gandhi lived in the nearness of God. His *sarvodaya* is nothing but an effort to make his fellow-Indians purer and purer and thus make them live more and more near to God.

### **Concluding remarks**

From this rapid and all too inadequate historical survey of the Hindu experience of God we can draw certain conclusions. First of all we are struck by the variety, richness and continuity of the God-experience handed down to us by Hinduism. From the Upaniṣadic period and even before it, till our own days Hinduism has not only not lacked men of tremendous spiritual realization, but has also shown that the Infinite Being can be experienced and expressed in numberless ways. The paths towards this God-realization are also varied.

In the sphere of God-realization Hinduism has cultivated individual and group initiative and spontaneity. Generally speaking Hinduism does not 'dogmatize' the spiritual experience of individuals or groups, nor does it set up one 'experience' as the norm of all genuine God-realization. Certainly in the theological thinking of various Hindu sects and sub-sects there is a tendency to dogmatization. But even in such cases the border lines between sect and sect are not clear-cut. They overlap and merge into one another. The absence of rigid religious organization with power-

to coerce or to proclaim authoritatively religious truths has helped the Hindus to seek and to experience God in many ways. In a religion which places the ultimate religious value in God-experience, there is little room for coercive religious structures.

Any genuine God-experience is ineffable. When such an experience is transmitted by a spiritual master to his disciples there necessarily takes place a process of dilution and even of falsification. Slowly the movement which springs from the original experience, lacking the immediacy, spontaneity and intensity of the origins, begins to stress the externals at the expense of the internal. The repetition of formulae whose essence is neither experienced nor understood becomes the norm of orthodoxy. This is the process of religious decadence to which so many Hindu movements in the past and the present have fallen victims. Yet it must be admitted that Hinduism had and still has enough vitality and inner resources to raise up men of genuine God-realization who can renew Hinduism from within.

The Advaitic experience of the 'Oneness of Reality' in the inner depths of man has not received sufficient attention from Christians. Some Western thinkers have termed the Advaitic experience 'natural mysticism'. It has also been considered a fence erected by sinful man to safeguard his self-sufficiency. This is certainly a harsh judgement on a genuine experience of the Absolute in the depths of the soul. It is something which we must experimentally search after. Hinduism has always presented itself as a means of God-experience. Historical Christianity as it massively entered into the history of this land and preached its message to the Indians, presented itself as an 'institution', as a system of religious thought logically precise, conceptually well elaborated and dogmatically formulated. At the same time it demanded from all certain definite practices, including works of corporal mercy, education and social involvement. But ultimately Christianity is nothing but the re-living of Jesus' oneness with his Father in the Spirit and his oneness with other men in self-sacrificing love. This essential element of experience which at present is to a great extent buried under the unbearable weight of institutions, concepts and formulations, must again be lived in India, if we truly desire to be the bearers of Jesus' dream.

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